

Using the Red and Black Alphabets

These alphabets are meant to be used for specific writing and spelling activities after the children have plenty of experience writing words using the traditional alphabet. When we get to these alphabets, children begin to refine their writing abilities and start to notice correct spellings.

Before you Begin

Before introducing the black or red alphabet to a child, be sure the child has had ample practice with the traditional (pink/blue) movable alphabet and the green phonogram sandpaper letters.

Preparing the Alphabet

Each alphabet needs to be contained in a box that easily displays each collection of letters and is usable by the young child. A lid is preferred to keep the letters dust free. If you purchased our craft box, set up the dividers as shown in the photos above. Keep the apostrophes in storage (not in the box) until you are ready to do the contraction work (Lesson 8-Word Study). Store the alphabet where the child can get it without help. The child should have ample practice in carrying the box (from using the traditional alphabet) and in finding/replacing letters. However, if necessary, repeat these lessons (as described in the traditional Movable Alphabet lesson plan) the first time you use this alphabet.



Lesson 1. Phonogram Lists

1. Invite one or two children to work with you. Go to the shelf together and bring the following materials to your work area: black movable alphabet, red movable alphabet, and either the phonogram object box or a packet of phonogram reading cards.
Note: Each of the object names in the phonogram reading cards or phonogram object box must follow the rules of *phonetic* English. That is to say, they must be spelled the way they sound (e.g., *tree*, *star*, *fish*).
2. Place the alphabets on the top left of the rug. Open both alphabet boxes.
3. Guide the child to choose her favorite object or photo-only card from the phonogram materials. Put this just below the two movable alphabets.
4. Say, "Let's write the name of the picture on this card." Use the black and red alphabets to write the item's name. The phonogram should be written with red letters and the rest of the word with black letters.
5. Say, "I'm thinking of another word with this same phonogram!" Say a fun word that contains the phonogram. Write this word as above by using red letters for the phonogram and black letters for the rest.
6. Inspire the child to think of more words with this phonogram and write them down.
7. Free the child to repeat this work, complete it at their own pace, and choose it again whenever they like.

Note: At this point, the child should have enough experience with alphabet work that they do not need guidance from you when cleaning up/putting the alphabets away. If the materials are not put away nicely, revisit the lessons on how to take letters out of and put them back into the boxes.

Lesson 2. Vowel Phonogram Exploration

1. Invite one or more children to work with you. Go to the shelf together and bring the black and red movable alphabets to your work area. Place the alphabets on the top left of the rug. Open both alphabet boxes.
2. Choose a vowel-based phonogram (such as oa) and write it with red letters just below the alphabets. Take the "a" from the black alphabet and place it just to the left of the phonogram. Sound it out. It doesn't make a word so try it to the right of oa (the end of the word). It still doesn't make a word so put the "a" back. Now, take the b and repeat the procedure. Keep going until you find a letter that makes something that the child recognizes as a word (like oak). Spelling does not count (so doa would be fine instead of doe). Leave that word on the rug and then repeat the procedure by taking out two new red letters to write the phonogram



- again, just below the first word. Then, take the next letter from the black alphabet and place it to the right of the phonogram.
- Encourage the child to continue exploring the phonogram with all of the letters of the alphabet.
- Notes:* This is not a strictly beginning or ending sound work. The purpose is to help the child notice the phonogram in words, to build words around that phonogram, and to enjoy language. Follow your instincts and have fun making real and impossible words when presenting this work.
- Free the child to repeat the work and choose it whenever they like.

Lesson 3. Consonant Phonogram Exploration

Repeat as in Lesson 2 above but choose a consonant-based phonogram (e.g., sh).

Lesson 4. Spelling Phonogram Booklets

This is the first exercise in the Children's House where spelling counts. Ideally, your classroom will have a series of phonogram booklets as described in the Muriel Dwyer Reading Scheme. Each little book contains many pages each with only one word on the right-hand page. The word is spelled with a single phonogram written in red and the rest of the word is written in black (e.g., hair, cloud). Invite one or two children to choose one of the booklets. Read the booklet together. Then, if a child is working alone, say, "I wonder how many of these words you can remember and write down with the alphabets!" Guide them to write the phonogram in red and the rest of the word in black. Then, guide them to check their own work with the booklet. If two children are working together, guide one child to dictate a word while the second child writes it with the alphabets. They check the written work with the booklet and can take turns writing and dictating. They love this!

Lesson 5. Phonogram Sentences

- Invite one or two children to work with you. Place the alphabets on the top left of the rug. Open both alphabet boxes.
- Say, "I like the sh phonogram. I'm going to see if I can think of a sentence that uses the sh phonogram as many times as possible!" Have fun thinking of a sentence that features your phonogram like, 'She splashes hash on her shirt.' Write it down being sure to use only red letters to isolate your chosen phonogram.
- Guide the children to have a turn using the same phonogram or another of their choosing.
- Free the children to repeat the work and choose it whenever they like.

Lesson 6. Spelling a Phonogram Chart

- Ideally, your classroom will contain a small basket or pouch with several phonogram charts. Each chart features a list of words containing a single phonogram. Guide the child to choose one chart and the black or red alphabet and bring it to your work area.
- Read the chart together. Then, if a child is working alone, say, "I wonder how many of these words you can remember and write down with the alphabet!" Turn the card over on the rug and guide them to write the entire word with the alphabet. (Note: They no longer need to isolate the phonogram in red but can write the entire word in one color). Then, guide them to check their own work with the chart. If two children are working together, guide one child to dictate a word while the second child writes it with the alphabet. They check their written work with the chart and can take turns writing and dictating. This is so much fun!
- Free the children to repeat the work and choose it whenever they like.

Lesson 7. Spelling Two Phonogram Charts

- This is the same as in Lesson 6 above but this time the child(ren) chooses two charts that feature the same sound (e.g., ou in cloud and ow in clown). Invite one or two children to work with you and bring the black and red alphabets and two phonogram charts featuring the same key sound (e.g., oy as in boy and oi as in foil) to your work area. The following instructions are for a single child. If working with two children, encourage one to dictate the words to the other child.
- Say, "There are two ways to spell this sound." Point to the charts and show them how the two different spellings create the same sound. Read several words



together to confirm.

3. Say, "I wonder if you can remember which word is written with which phonogram. Let's write all the words with the oy phonogram in red and all the words with the oi phonogram in black."
4. Read the charts and then turn them upside-down on your work area. Remember some words from the charts. Write the oy words in black just beneath the black alphabet and write the oi words in red just beneath the red alphabet.
5. Say, "Let's see if I was right!" Demonstrate how to use the chart to check your work. With a light-heart, correct any errors and then give the child a turn.
6. Free the child to repeat the work and choose it whenever they like.

Lesson 8. Word Study

Note: Ideally, your classroom will contain cards and charts for Word Study activities. After the child works with the card and chart word study materials, inspire them to practice writing those types of words with the black and red movable alphabets as follows:

1. **Compound Words:** Tell the child, "I'm thinking of two words that we put together to make one word." Give several examples and write each one down. Write the first-half of the compound word with the black alphabet and the second-half of the compound word with the red alphabet (e.g., starfish). Encourage the child to continue with more and more compound words.
2. **Singular and Plural:** Tell the child, "I'm thinking of a word that sounds different when it describes one thing than it does when it describes more than one of that thing." Give several examples (e.g., cat, cats) and write each one down. Write the singular word with the black alphabet and the plural form of the word with the red alphabet. Encourage the child to continue to write more and more pairs of singulars and plurals.
3. **Contractions:** Before beginning this activity, you will need to add the apostrophes into the alphabet box. You may wish to keep them in an elastic and house them in front of the z's. When you open the box, take them out and place them on the work area just to the right of the box. Tell the child, "I'm thinking of two words that we squish together to make a new word that means the same thing." Give several examples (e.g., do not, don't) and write each one down. Write the two individual words with the black alphabet and the contraction with the red alphabet. Encourage the child to continue to write more and more contractions.
4. **Synonyms:** Tell the child, "I'm thinking of words that tell us what kind of thing we are talking about." Give several examples (e.g., small, huge, hairy) and encourage the child to come up with more. Write them down in a column with the black alphabet. Then say, "Now I'm thinking of another word that means the same thing as this first word." Write it using the red alphabet and place it just to the right of the first word. Continue for all the words letting the child step in and take over as soon as s/he is ready.
5. **Antonyms:** This is the same procedure as with synonyms. After you've made your first list of adjectives, say, "Now I'm thinking of another word that means the opposite of this first word!" Write a list of adjectives with the black alphabet and their antonyms right next to them with the red alphabet.
6. **Word Study Charts:** This is the same procedure as in Lesson 7 above but uses a Word Study chart (e.g., masculine and feminine, compound words, plurals).