

Print Awareness: Guidelines for Instruction

By: Texas Education Agency (2001)

Print awareness is a child's earliest understanding that written language carries meaning. The foundation of all other literacy learning builds upon this knowledge. The following are guidelines for teachers in how to promote print awareness and a sample activity for assessing print awareness in young children.

Guidelines for promoting print awareness

The organization of books

Make sure students know how books are organized. They should be taught the basics about books – that they are read from left to right and top to bottom, that print may be accompanied by pictures or graphics, that the pages are numbered, and that the purpose of reading is to gain meaning from the text and understand ideas that words convey.

Read to students

Read to children from books with easy-to-read large print. Use stories that have predictable words in the text.

Use "big books" and draw attention to words and letters

Help children notice and learn to recognize words that occur frequently, such as a, the, is, was, and you. Draw attention to letters and punctuation marks within the story.

Label objects and centers in your classroom

Use an index card to label objects and centers within the classroom with words and pictures. Use an index card with the word "house" for the house center and draw a picture of a house. Draw students' attention to these words when showing them the different centers.

Encourage preschool children to play with print

They can pretend to write a shopping list, construct a stop sign, write a letter, make a birthday card, etc.

Help children understand the relationship between spoken and written language

Encourage students to find letters on a page that are in their names: "Look at this word, 'big.' It begins with the same letter as the name of someone in this room, 'Ben.'"

Play with letters of the alphabet

Read the book Chicka Chicka Boom Boom. Place several copies of each letter of the alphabet in a bowl and ask students to withdraw one letter. When everyone has a letter, ask each student to say the letter's name and, if the letter is in his or her own name, have the child keep the letter. Continue until the first child spells his or her name wins.

Reinforce the forms and functions of print

Point them out in classroom signs, labels, posters, calendars, and so forth.

Teach and reinforce print conventions

Discuss print directionality (print is written and read from left to right), word boundaries, capital letters, and end punctuation.

Teach and reinforce book awareness and book handling

Promote word awareness by helping children identify word boundaries and compare words

Allow children to practice what they are learning

Ask them to listen to and participate in the reading of predictable and patterned stories and books.

Provide practice with predictable and patterned books

Also try using a wordless picture book like Pancakes. Go through each page asking the children to tell the story from the pictures. Write their narration on a large piece of paper. Celebrate the story they authored by eating pancakes!

Provide many opportunities for children to hear good books and to participate in read-aloud activities

A sample activity for assessing print awareness

Give a student a storybook and ask him or her to show you:

the front of the book

the title of the book

where you should begin reading

a letter

a word

the first word of a sentence

the last word of a sentence

the first and last word on a page

punctuation marks

a capital letter

a lowercase letter

the back of the book

Excerpted and adapted from: Guidelines for Examining Phonics and Word Recognition Programs, Texas Reading Initiative, Texas Education Agency (2002). And from: Tips for Teaching Kids to Read; by Ed Kame'enui, Marilyn Adams, & G. Reid Lyon.