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Letterland

Letterland is a comprehensive teaching system designed to increase reading success. It is intended for use with children ages three to seven plus.

All aspects of reading are taught through metaphors, stories, and songs.

Although designed for use by teachers in classrooms, it is also an excellent resource for speech-language pathologists.

Letterland is an imaginary place where characters hide in the written word. Each alphabet letter is animated with an alliterative character (Clever Cat, Munching Mike). These characters are used to solve many of the difficulties encountered by beginning readers. The animation of each letter cues the younger reader to examine the letter in left to right orientation, reducing difficulties with letter shape and orientation. For example, the faces on the letter look to the right and the feet point to the right. The alliterative labels assist children with letter-sound correspondence. Increased interest in literacy experiences is facilitated by the stories and songs about each of the characters.

The materials reviewed represent a small sample of the vast array available but will provide an indication of the depth and breadth of the program.

Early Years Handbook (M. Wendon & J. Manson)

This resource includes wonderful strategies for explaining “why” letters make the sounds they do, how upper and lower case letters are related, and even why the vowels make more than one sound. For example, “A” (Annie Apple) is a smiling apple with a face inside the lower case “a”. She is used to teach the short vowel. The capital A shapes are called apple stands and show the apples piled up on the crossbar inside the letter. The long vowel is introduced as Mr. A, the Apron Man who takes care of Annie Apple and her friends. His apron holds many apples, effectively creating a connection

between the two sounds and two print patterns. Many resources pair characters with letter and sounds. Letterland is unique in that the characters are embedded into the grapheme, thus the characters hide within the print, offering a direct link between the character and letter shape.

This manual would provide an excellent resource for speech-language pathologists working in pre-school settings. It provides an extraordinary guide to incorporation of phonemic awareness intervention or prevention programs in the pre-school years for children “at risk” for reading difficulties. The approach to teaching each sound could easily be incorporated in articulation and phonological intervention, providing valuable literacy and narrative experience in addition to traditional sound production practice. As the program includes the extensive story exposure and generation of expressive language, it could also be used as part of general language stimulation and intervention for the expressive language delays.

Letterland ABC (L. Wendon & R. Carlisle)

This hard cover storybook introduces Letterland as the imaginary world of letters. Each alphabet character is presented through a short story. The colourful pictographs are displayed as well as sample words in upper and lower case letters. The stories are interesting and allow for continued exposure to the phonemic awareness skills of letter-sound correspondence and alliteration. The short stories also could be used to provide auditory bombardment to targeted sounds during phonological intervention.

Alphabet Songs Cassette Handwriting Songs Cassette

These cassettes help children learn the sounds for each letter and how each letter is formed in print. They are all sung to familiar children’s songs. The songs for print learning are extremely creative, using the animation of each sound as cues for letter formation. For example, the following rhyme for “B” (Bouncy Ben):

Brush down Ben's big long ears.
Go up around his head so his face appears.

Early Years Workbooks (L. Wendon)

Again, this resource will be useful to speech-language pathologists for use as home practice for specific articulation goals and for early literacy exposure in the classroom or home.

Parent's Guide (J. Manson)

This resource is intended for parents and introduces the Letterland approach and the characters. It is colourful, easy to read and well organized. It provides excellent suggestions for games and activities to reinforce literacy in the home. The emphasis is on play-based activities to encourage an interest and excitement for print and reading. This resource could also be used by speech-language pathology assistants or volunteers as a quick and specific instruction and orientation to early literacy training.

Bedtime Stories (L. Fidge)

This is a lovely collection of additional stories involving the Letterland characters. Each story takes about five minutes to read and offers continued exposure to alliteration and sound-letter correspondence. This resource would also be ideal for auditory exposure for specific articulation sound targets. The stories could also be used as the basis for role-play and naturalistic activities for many articulation, phonological, and expressive language goals.

Letterland Links

Letterland At Home Books

Letterland Storybooks

All are interesting and colourfully illustrated. Speech-language pathologists will find these to be a terrific resource for auditory bombardment, and sentence and conversational level sound production practice, in addition to the intended literacy purposes.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The materials available through Letterland are economical and have a multitude of uses. Most phonemic awareness resources are designed for children above the age of five. Letterland is unique in providing resources for children as young as three and extending into the early elementary grades. They are the most valuable resources I have seen for pre-school children. The material provides a structured, exciting method for introducing early literacy skills and continuing the instruction through the early school years.

Throughout this program, instruction in literacy, print, and phonemic awareness does not rely on meta-linguistic skills or complex vocabulary. All instruction is done through narrative and natural experience.

The materials have immense potential for integration into individual and group intervention for phonemic awareness, articulation, phonology, and expressive language. One of the great strengths of the manuals, audiotapes, and accompanying materials is their high degree of structure, making it appropriate for use by speech-language pathology assistants and families. The wide range of materials saves time in developing activities for use in the home or by aides and assistants.

We have used these materials with pre-school children presenting with moderate to severe disorders of phonology with great success. They were captivated by the characters and stories and often spontaneously began including print during activities focussing on sound production practice.

I would highly recommend the use of the materials.