

Creative Adventures with Literature

#13: *Alphabet Under Construction* by Denise Fleming

Introduction

The *Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards: Birth through 60 months* focus on the three components of the **Domain: Creativity and Aesthetics**. The components are: **Music and Movement, Visual Arts, and Drama**. In the book, *Alphabet Under Construction*, there is a primary focus on **Visual Arts**. Many of the activities also support the **Domain: Emergent Literacy**, especially the **Strand: Alphabet Knowledge**.

Alphabet Under Construction by Denise Fleming features illustrations that are big, bold, and vibrant and text that is bare minimum – just the letter and construction verb. In the book, Mouse is hard at work as he constructs the alphabet letter by letter. Mouse begins by airbrushing the A and ends by zipping the Z.

Story Preparation

- Become familiar with the book.
- Be prepared to help children understand some of the unfamiliar verbs by giving explanations, demonstrations, examples and asking them questions to find out what they know about the verb. For example:
 - carves the C – Mouse is using a chisel and mallet (like a hammer) to shape the C
 - dyes the D – Ask children what else we dye at Easter (if children dye eggs).
 - ices the I – Ask children to name other things we ice or put icing on (cake and cupcakes)
 - judges the J – When someone wins a prize, they are sometimes given a blue ribbon; for example, if a person wins a race
 - kinks the K - Have a straw and bend it and explain that this is how Mouse kinks the K, or make the K with two straws and show it to children
 - okays the O – When we say something is alright, that means it is okay. Make the O with your thumb and forefinger
 - prunes the P – When we trim a bush we are pruning it
 - quilts the Q – When we sew or stitch together two layers of cloth filled with stuffing
 - tiles the T – Have a piece of tile and talk about where tiles are used in a house; on the floor, on cabinets, or in the bathroom, for example
 - unrolls the U – Roll a piece of paper with a U written on it, then unroll it.
 - x-rays the X – X-rays are photographs or pictures of the inside of a body; have a sample x-ray
 - yanks the Y – Yanks means to pull or jerk

Story Presentation

Learning Goals:

CD2.4 Holds and manipulates information in memory (*short-term and working memory*)

LD1.1 Understands and responds to language (in child's home language) (*vocabulary and language comprehension*)

EL1.1 Shows interest in literacy experiences (*engagement in literacy experiences, variety of interests*)

EL1.2 Engages in read-alouds and conversations about books and stories (*story comprehension*)

EL3.1 Responds to features of books and print (*book knowledge, print knowledge*)

EL3.2 Shows knowledge of the shapes, names, and sounds of letters (*alphabet knowledge*)

Book: *Alphabet Under Construction* by Denise Fleming

First Reading of *Alphabet Under Construction*

- Show the cover and invite children to look at the cover and describe what they see.
- Give the title and author.
- Repeat the title and ask children what they think this means. Accept all answers.
- Show Mouse and say, "In this book, Mouse constructs the alphabet. Let's read and see how he does this."
- Begin with the A and continue through the Z. Explain some of the words that may be unfamiliar to children as outlined in Story Preparation.
- Allow children to make comments about what Mouse is doing. This will give you some idea of their understanding of the verbs and their interest in the book.
- Follow up by selecting a few of the pages to review with the children; pages with verbs that children seem to understand and can be successful in recalling. Some examples might be: buttons the B, measures the M, nails the N and zips the Z.

Teacher Note: Consider this alternative follow up. Invite children to recall some of the letters of the alphabet that Mouse constructed and how he constructed them.

Second Reading of *Alphabet Under Construction*

- Show the cover, give title and author.
- Read the words on the toolbox: FRAGILE HANDLE WITH CARE. Invite children to tell you what they think this means. Accept all answers.
- Explain to children that you want them to help you read about how Mouse constructs the different letters of the alphabet.
- Begin with A and progress through Z. Pay attention to children's reaction and give explanations, examples, demonstrations or ask questions accordingly.
- Follow up by inviting children to stand and to pantomime some of the verbs that Mouse used to construct the alphabet. Explain to them that pantomime means to pretend to do something without talking. Show the selected pages as children pantomime the actions.
 - airbrushes the A – Children pretend to have a hose in their hand as they spray.
 - buttons the B – Children pretend to button a piece of their clothing.
 - nails the N – Children pretend to use a hammer.
 - prunes the P – Children pretend to use shears to prune or trim a bush.
 - saws the S – Children pretend to use a saw to cut a piece of wood.
 - vacuums the V – Children pretend to use a vacuum cleaner to vacuum the carpet
 - zips the Z – Children pretend to zip up their jacket.

Additional Learning Goal:

CA3.1 Explores feelings, relationships, and concepts through imitation, pretend play, and sociodramatic play (*exploration of drama*)

Third Reading of *Alphabet Under Construction*

- Form small groups of no more than six children for the third reading. This will allow children to have a close up look at the pictures
- Show the cover and invite children to recall the title.
- Begin to read the book, allowing children to make comments, ask questions, and answer questions you ask. For example:
Point out the air tank when Mouse airbrushes the A. Explain that the tank has air in it that blows through the hose and blows the paint onto the A. Ask children to blow on their hand to feel the air.
Show Mouse as he carves the C. Ask children to look closely at the picture and ask them what they think Mouse is carving.
Show Mouse as he measures the M. Ask children what Mouse is using to measure the M. Ask them to think of other things we measure. Have a tape measure to show the children.

Teacher Note: *Read the book again with other small groups of children so that all have an opportunity to be involved in the experience.*

Creative Art Extensions

Learning Goals:

CD1.1 Shows curiosity and a willingness to try new things (*exploration and investigation*)

LD1.1 Understands and responds to language (in child's home language) (*vocabulary and language comprehension, follows directions*)

PH2.2 Adjusts grasp and coordinates movements to use tools (*variety of tools*)

CA2.1 Explores, manipulates, creates, and responds to a variety of art media (*exploration of art*)

Activity: Straw Painting

Materials: short plastic straws (one per child), different colors of tempera paint, white paper, small spoons, recycled containers such as small margarine or yogurt tubs

Directions:

- Prepare the tempera paint so that it is thin enough to blow easily and thick enough to resist soaking into the paper too soon and place each color in a separate container.
- Prepare the straws by pricking tiny holes with a straight pin in the straw to prevent children from sucking up the paint rather than blowing it out.
- Explain to children that if they choose to straw paint, they are to use their own straw, not someone else's straw and that when they are finished with their painting, they are to throw the straw away.
- Place the paint containers next to the paper. Provide a small spoon for each container.
- Explain to children that they can experiment with a new way to paint a picture; that it is called straw painting.
- Ask children to place their hand at the end of the straw and to blow into the other end. Invite them to tell you what happened. (They blew the air through the straw.)
- Invite children to predict what will happen if they put a small amount of paint on the paper and blow on it with the straw. Accept all answers.
- Allow children to experiment with straw painting.
- Be an observer. Do children add more paint? Do they add another color to the original color and notice that a new color is created. Do some children stay with the activity longer than others?

Teacher Notes:

- *Use slick-surfaced paper if it is available. This type paper does not allow paint to soak through so quickly.*
- *Suggest that children dip the end of their straw into the paint, move the straw over the paper, and drop the paint onto the paper.*

Activity: Squirt Bottle Painting

Materials: plastic squirt bottles, tempera paint, paper (large sheets)

Directions:

- Prepare thick tempera paint of different colors, each in a separate plastic squirt bottle.
- Invite children to squirt colors on their paper to create a design.
- Observe to see if children mix colors and create new colors. If so, notice and comment. For example, say, "I see you made purple. How did you do that?" (child mixed red and blue)

Teacher Notes:

- *Supervise this activity to make sure children squirt small amounts of paint at one time and that they only squirt on their paper.*
 - *Consider covering the table with newspaper to make clean up easier.*
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Activity: Construct a Collage

Materials: small squares of tile, wallpaper samples, yarn, straws, strong paper or cardboard for collage base

Directions:

- Show, name and explain to children that you have placed some new materials in the Art Center; materials that were in the book, *Alphabet Under Construction*.
- Allow children to use the materials as they choose.

Teacher Note: *Basic materials such as glue, scissors, crayons and markers should always be in the Art Center.*

Activity: Playdough Alphabet

Materials: playdough, small rolling pin, alphabet dough cutters or stampers, vinyl placemats

Directions:

- Guide children to use vinyl placemats when they use playdough. This defines individual space and makes it easier for clean-up.
- Introduce the alphabet dough cutters or stampers to children. This can be done during group time or in the Art Center.
- Explain to children that the dough cutters or stampers will be in the art center for them to use with playdough.
- Observe to see if children use the materials. Listen to their comments and respond if appropriate. For example, if Ben points to a B he has made and says, "That's my name." respond, "Yes, Ben, that's a B. Your name begins with a B."

Extension:

- Model rolling playdough into long ropes or "snakes" and say, "I wonder if we could make letters of the alphabet with this playdough."
- Observe children to see if they roll out the playdough and make letters. If they do, notice and make comments such as, "Jay, I see you've made the letter J. That's the first letter in your name." If there are other children whose names begin with the same letter, comment that "Julia and Josh's names also begin with a J."

Additional Learning Goal:

EL3.2 Shows knowledge of the shapes, names, and sounds of letters (*alphabet knowledge*)

Creative Drama and Dramatic Play Extensions

Learning Goals:

PH2.2 Adjusts grasp and coordinates movements to use tools (*variety of tools*)

CA3.1 Explores feelings, relationships, and concepts through imitation, pretend play, and sociodramatic play (*exploration of drama*)

Activity: Construction Prop Box

Contents: rubber mallet, plastic spatula, cloth tape measurer, tiles of different sizes, wallpaper samples, paint brush

Directions:

- Place the prop box in the Dramatic Play Center.
- Allow children to play with the props as they choose.
- Observe children and listen to their comments as they play with the props. How do they use the various props? Do they pretend to construct things?

Teacher Note: *The construction prop box can also be placed in the Block Center or taken outdoors.*

Activity: Magnetic Letters

Materials: Magnetic baking sheet or magnetic board and magnetic letters, both upper and lower case, note pads and pencils

Directions:

- Place the magnet baking sheet or magnetic board, magnetic letters and note pads and pencils in the Dramatic Play Center.
- Observe to see how children use the added props

Additional Learning Goals:

PH2.2 Adjusts grasp and coordinates movements to use tools (*writing and drawing tools*)

EL3.2 Shows knowledge of the shapes, names, and sounds of letters (*alphabet knowledge*)

Creative Music Experiences

Learning Goals:

EL3.2 Shows knowledge of the shapes, names, and sounds of letters (*alphabet knowledge*)

CA1.1 Explores through listening, singing, creating, and moving to music (*exploration of music and movement*)

Activity: Dancing around the Alphabet

Materials: CD of dance tunes, alphabet mats (purchased or teacher-made)

Directions:

- Scatter the alphabet mats in a large open space.
- Explain to children that you will play a dance tune and they are to dance around the alphabet until the music stops. When the music stops, they are to put their hand on an alphabet mat near them and name the letter when asked. State that more than one child may put his or her hand on the mat and they will name the letter together.
- Begin to play a lively dance tune, stop the music and invite the children to name the letter of the alphabet they are touching.
- Continue this activity as long as the children remain interested.

Teacher Note: *Make alphabet mats by printing a different alphabet letter on cardstock, laminate and attach non-slip shelf/drawer liner on the back to prevent the mat from slipping when children put their hand on them.*

Additional Books

A My Name is Alice by Jane Bayer, illustrated by Steven Kellogg

Museum ABC by Metropolitan Museum of Art

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom by Bill Martin, Jr, and John Archambault, illustrated by Lois Ehlert (also available in Spanish and DVD format)

Additional “Alphabet under Construction” Ideas

Learning Goal:

PH2.2 Adjusts grasp and coordinates movements to use tools (*variety of tools*)

Activity: Roller Painting

- Collect paint rollers with handles and the container in which to place paint (water).
- Take the rollers and container outdoors.
- Add water to the container.
- Allow children to paint the sides of the building.

Learning Goal:

SS1.1 Demonstrates positive connection to family and communication (*awareness of roles in society*)

Activity: Construction Guest

- Invite a guest to the classroom; someone who can share some of the construction ideas from the book. For example, a carpenter with construction tools.
- Discuss with the guest the amount of time he will have with the children, whether or not the children can handle items that are safe for them, and if he can demonstrate a skill such as hammering two pieces of wood together.
- Prepare the children for the visitor by giving them his or her name, explaining to them the items he or she will bring to share, and whether or not they can handle them.
- Remain with children so that you can insure that this is a safe and enjoyable experience for the children and the guest.
- Involve children in a discussion of what they observed and enjoyed about the visit.
- Follow up by involving children in writing a thank you note to the guest.