

Pre-Literacy Skills For Preschoolers



the language tree
creative speech, language & literacy clinic

A Welcome From . . .

Vicki Selwyn-Barnett



I'm thrilled you took the time to download my Pre-Literacy Skills For Preschoolers eBook to help your child. The advice contained here has been developed and tested with successful outcomes over many years in my clinic. Have fun playing!

If you have any questions, or would like to book an appointment, please email me: vicki@thelanguagetree.com.au and I'll be in touch.



As a qualified speech & language pathologist, I have over 29 years experience and am the proprietor and founder of The Language Tree, speech, language & literacy clinic, based in Sydney, Australia.

I also established The Spellit Practice in May 2000 in London, (www.spellitpractice.co.uk). I'm a published author and specialise in treating children with literacy, language and articulation disorders.

I enjoy working with children of all ages from pre-school to adolescence and provide a range of services in addition to direct 1:1 therapy.

Designed to empower parents to work actively with their children in a guided and rewarding manner, these extra services include: online courses for literacy skills, masterclasses, parent workshops & holiday intensives for interstate and overseas clients.

I've designed and developed the TLT System® over the last 20 years, including an adapted version for ESL students. I'm qualified in Integrated Listening Systems (iLS), The Spalding Method®, parent-child interaction & I'm a trained Defeat Autism Now (DAN) Practitioner.

For more information about my online, pre-literacy course, please visit: [Literacy Fun-da-men-tools](#)

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Chapter 1



Pre-Literacy & Early Literacy Skills



CHAPTER 1

PRE-LITERACY & EARLY LITERACY SKILLS

Phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics are super important pre-literacy & early literacy skills.

A child's phonemic awareness on entering school is most closely related to their later success in learning to read.

Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness involves auditory skills. It is the ability to listen, detect and generate the following:

- Rhyme (*bear, hair, chair, care*)
- Syllable Segmentation (*but - ter - fly*)
- First Sound Awareness (*bear, butterfly, badger*)
- Blending (*b - ear = bear*)

Phonological awareness is also known as pre-literacy, early literacy or as phonological skills.

Many parents are unaware that the brain's auditory pathways for pre-literacy need stimulating as well as consistent rehearsal before actual reading and writing (which involves both auditory and visual pathways) can occur.

The first phonological awareness skill to develop is typically rhyming, which develops from 2 ½ years of age. **Please see the check list on page 7 for the sequence and age of all phonological skill development.**

Phonological awareness skills are sometimes not taught in pre-school, kindergarten or at school, or if they are, they may not be taught systematically in enough depth or for long enough to achieve the required brain pathways needed for later literacy.

Some aspects of phonological awareness typically develop through exposure to books that are based on rhyme and alliteration. However, all four phonological awareness skills do not necessarily develop into the more sophisticated phonemic awareness skills.

Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness also involves auditory skills. It is the awareness that a word is made up of individual units of sound, known as phonemes.

For example:

- Cat is made of three distinct sounds, /c/ /a/ /t/, as is shark /sh/ /ar/ /k/.

Your child needs to be able to decipher and manipulate individual sounds in order to form words. **Please see the check list on page 7 for the sequence and age of all phonological skill development.**

Phonemic awareness develops before visual letter recognition (phonics) and is an important auditory pre-literacy skill to master.

It is a child's phonemic awareness on entering school that is most closely related to their later success in learning to read. Phonemic awareness is dependent upon well developed phonological awareness skills.





CHAPTER 1

PRE-LITERACY & EARLY LITERACY SKILLS

Phonics

Phonics involves both visual and auditory skills. Phonics is also known as letter (grapheme) to sound (phoneme) correspondence. It is based on the alphabetic principle. The grapheme-phoneme relationship suggests that a particular letter shape or letter combinations can make a sound or sounds.

For example:

- The letter /a/ makes six different sounds in: *apple, apricot, water, bath, many, swan.*
- The letter /b/ can only make one sound in: *bath, rub, boat.*
- The letter combinations /sh/ and /ar/ each make one sound in: *shark, sheep, shop, park, start, farm.*

In order to read fluently, your child must have fast, accurate and stable phonic skills/letter recognition. Remember, phonics is dependent upon well developed auditory pathways (phonological and phonemic skills).

Some Research

There is plentiful research to suggest that if a child has a history of speech or language difficulties they are at much greater risk of developing literacy difficulties.

- The ability to detect and generate rhyme at age 3½ years was found to be a strong predictor in determining later literacy success (Bradley & Bryant, 1983)
- Dunn (1991) & Griffith & Olson (1992), confirmed that a child's level of phonological awareness appears to be the strongest known predictor of later reading acquisition

Once a phonological, phonemic awareness or phonic issue is discovered, speech, literacy and language remediation is often an expensive and lengthy process. If left untreated in kindergarten, children can quickly fall behind their peers and feel unable to thrive at school. These issues frequently lower self-esteem for children. They often refer to themselves as "stupid" "dumb" or say they "hate reading". If left untreated beyond Year 1, children are likely to struggle throughout their primary years at school, and then can go on to become adults who may struggle with literacy in life.

Facts & Figures

- 11% of 3 – 6 year olds in Australia have communication disorders
- 10% to 15% of 5 – 6 year olds in the UK struggle to read and spell (there are approximately two to three children in every classroom experiencing ongoing learning difficulties)
- Findings from the recent Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) show that nearly 1 in 5 Australian children are not meeting international benchmarks for reading
- Australia has one of the largest proportions of students who fall below the "intermediate" benchmark into the "low" or "below low" categories compared to other English speaking countries, including the US, Canada and the UK
- An independent report prepared last year for state and territory governments by Susan Pascoe, of the Australian Council for International Development, and Professor Deborah Brennan, of the University of NSW, found "extensive and consistent" research evidence of the benefits of quality early childhood education. The years before school are *"the period when children learn to communicate, get along with others and control and adapt their behaviour, emotions and thinking. These skills and behaviours establish the foundations for future skills and success,"* the report says. Quality early childhood education gives all children the best chance of establishing these capabilities.



Chapter 2



Check Lists



Phonological & Phonemic Check List

Mark any of the age appropriate developmental milestones that your child finds challenging.

Phonological awareness is first to develop and involves the knowledge of sounds (rhyme, syllables, first sounds, blending). Each stage of development assumes that the preceding stages have been successfully achieved. Phonemic awareness develops next and finally phonics.

Age	Developmental milestones	Possible implications if milestones not achieved
2–3 years	<input type="radio"/> Awareness of rhyme emerges at 24–30 months (child may laugh at funny rhymes) (eg. mummy, tummy, lummy, wummy)	None
3–4 years	<input type="radio"/> Ability to generate rhyme emerges at 30–36 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child may struggle with recognising similarities in letter patterns in words (eg. cat, hat, mat, bat). Remember, rhyming skills at age 3½ years was found to be a strong predictor in determining later literacy success (Bradley & Bryant, 1983).
4–5 years	<input type="radio"/> Claps/counts syllables in words (eg. computer- com-pu-ter) <i>Note: 50% of children achieve this by age 4</i> <input type="radio"/> First Sound Awareness (detects words that start with same sound) (eg. cat, cup, key, cow, kite) <input type="radio"/> Segments/blends words by onset/rime (eg. s+un= sun) <input type="radio"/> Blends 3 sounds to make a word (early phonemic awareness) (eg. c – a – t = cat) <input type="radio"/> Counts sounds in words (eg. dog: d-o-g = 3 sounds) <i>Note: 50% of children achieve this by age 5</i> <input type="radio"/> Letter recognition emerging (phonics / alphabet) <i>Note: many children enjoy writing their name by age 5</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child may struggle with spelling longer words accurately as they will be unable to chunk them into smaller more manageable parts. The child may have difficulty articulating longer words and recognising similar word patterns. The child may have difficulty with spelling words accurately.
5–6 years	<input type="radio"/> Recognises words that rhyme and determines the odd word out (eg. cat – hat – big) <input type="radio"/> Produces first sound in a word when asked (eg. What's the sound at the start of 'dog'? d) <input type="radio"/> Produces last sound in a word when asked (eg. What's the sound at the end of 'dog'? g) <input type="radio"/> First Sound Awareness (generates words that start with same sound) (eg. peg, pin, pot) <input type="radio"/> Discriminates between similar sounding words (eg. sit, set, sat) <input type="radio"/> Blends 4 given sounds to make a word (eg. pond: p – o – n – d = 4 sounds) <input type="radio"/> Segments word into individual units of 3 or 4 sounds (phonemic awareness) (eg. hand = h – a – n – d: 4 sounds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child may have trouble spelling words correctly if they are unable to hear the individual sounds in different positions within words (phonemic awareness). The child may struggle with recognising that joining sounds together creates whole words and may have difficulty reading words fluently and accurately.
6–7 years	<input type="radio"/> Delete syllables from words (eg. Say 'cupcake'. Take away 'cup' and what is left? cake) <input type="radio"/> Substitute syllables in words (eg. 'cup-cake' mixed with 'ice cream' makes 'cup-cream' and 'ice-cake') <input type="radio"/> Delete sounds from words (eg. Say feet. Take away the 'f' sound from 'feet'? eat) <input type="radio"/> Substitute sounds in words (eg. Say hat. Change the 'h' to a 'c' – cat)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a child struggles with manipulating sounds in words, they may not be able to recognise similar letter/sound patterns within words. The child may struggle with creating a visual representation of a word and to hold onto that image in their mind as they manipulate (change) sounds to create new words.



Speech Sound Development Check List

Highlight any age appropriate speech sounds that your child finds challenging to say.

This chart shows the range of sounds your child should be able to produce within spoken words at various ages. For example by the time a child is 2 years and 6 months of age, they should be able to make the sounds: p, b, t, d, m, n, w and say words like: pot, ball, teddy, daddy, mummy, no, wet.

Age (upper limit)	Speech sounds
2 yrs 6 months	p b t d m n w
3 yrs 6 months	k g l y f s h
4 yrs 6 months	st sp z v j ch sh
5 yrs 6 months	pl cl r th fr dr thr shr

What if my child is struggling?

Phonological & phonemic awareness

If you notice that your child has difficulty with any of the skills, on the “phonological & phonemic awareness check list” (page 7), depending on their age, and severity of difficulty, or if you feel that they are not on track, it’s a good idea to stimulate the areas that are under-developed.

You can do so by:

1. Playing all the free games that are released weekly on my YouTube channel:

The Language Tree: Playing to Learn

and using the accompanying resource sheets in chapter 3.

2. If problems persist, or if your child is not grasping some areas of skill (eg. rhyming, blending) or you want a fully comprehensive, systematic, sequenced program, that also includes letter formation and phonics, check out my online program at:

<https://the-language-tree.teachable.com>

3. If you are concerned about any aspect of your child’s speech, language, early literacy or fine motor skill development, be sure to contact a qualified speech pathologist/therapist, an occupational therapist, audiologist or paediatrician. See the lists of associations and professionals on page 23, in chapter 3 for help with this.

What if my child is struggling?

*Speech sound development

If you notice that your child has difficulty with pronouncing any of the sounds, that they should be able to make for their age on the “speech sound development check list” above, please contact a qualified speech pathologist/therapist. See the lists of associations and professionals on page 23, in chapter 3 for help with this.

** Remember that any difficulties with speech sounds (articulation/pronunciation) are strongly linked to later literacy issues. Therefore it’s important to take your child to a speech therapist/pathologist at the earliest opportunity.*



Chapter 3



Resources & Help



CHAPTER 3

RESOURCES & HELP

At the clinic I often say “Mum or dad are the best toys in the house!” This refers to your child’s enjoyment when they spend quality time with their main adult carer, engaged in short bursts of daily play.

Play, Practice & Daily Dose

Spending just five to ten minutes a day with your child, engaged in one to one quality play, whilst keeping a specific purpose, goal or aim in mind, typically has a huge impact on each area of skill (rhyme, syllables, first sound, blending, letter formation).

Repetition & Rehearsal

To really develop deep learning and consolidation, children require repetition and rehearsal for any skill to be properly embedded. However, to avoid boredom, you’ll need to constantly change the activities, toys, objects, pictures and words, while still maintaining the same game objectives.

Don’t worry – I know many parents are short of time, so I have done this for you!

You’ll notice that in the YouTube videos on my channel “Playing To Learn”, we often rehearse the same skill but in each video, we do it using different toys, tasks, games or situations. The idea behind this is to give your child plenty of practice and encourage you as the parent, to turn any moment into an opportunity to develop your child’s pre-literacy skills.

YouTube Resources

Please use the resources on the following pages in conjunction with the YouTube videos where appropriate. There are also additional sheets for your child to enjoy as they become more proficient with their fine motor skills. Practice as many times as you wish and feel free to create your own versions or variations on the games, while still maintaining the aims.

Progress & Reward

In my clinic most children love using the “Smiley Face Tracker” (see page 21) so they can see their progress, whilst having an awareness of the skills they are practising. They also love negotiating with their parents as to the reward they will earn, once they’ve coloured in all the smiley faces at the completion of each practice session. Feel free to use this sheet as many times as you like. Your child can put stickers over the faces, rather than colouring in if they prefer.





CHAPTER 3

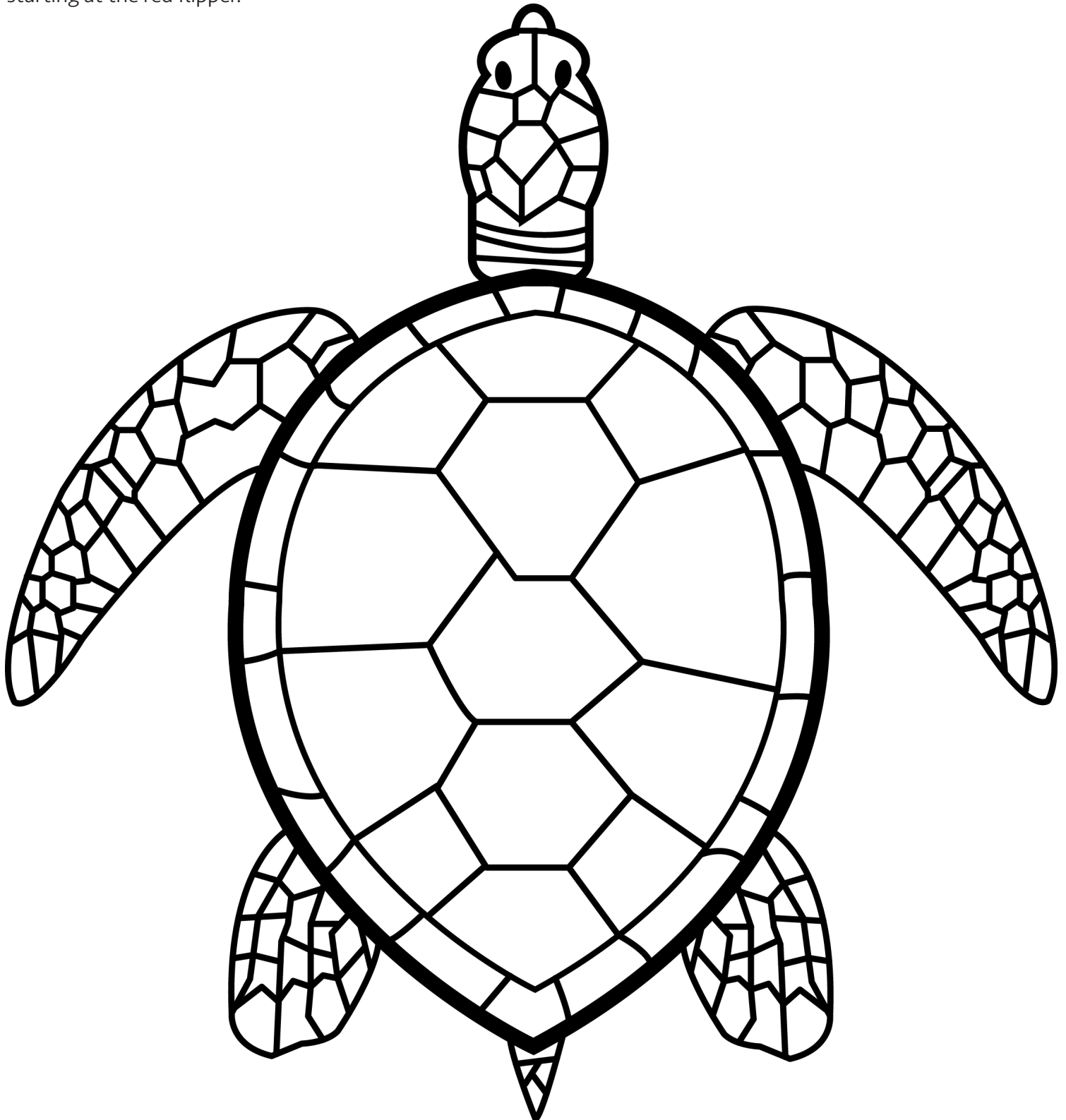
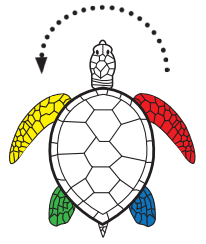
RESOURCES & HELP

YouTube Resources

Letter Formation: Draw A Turtle Shell

Don't forget to colour the turtle's flippers using the colours shown opposite.

As shown in the YouTube video, ask your child to draw round the turtle's shell in an anti-clockwise direction, starting at the red flipper.





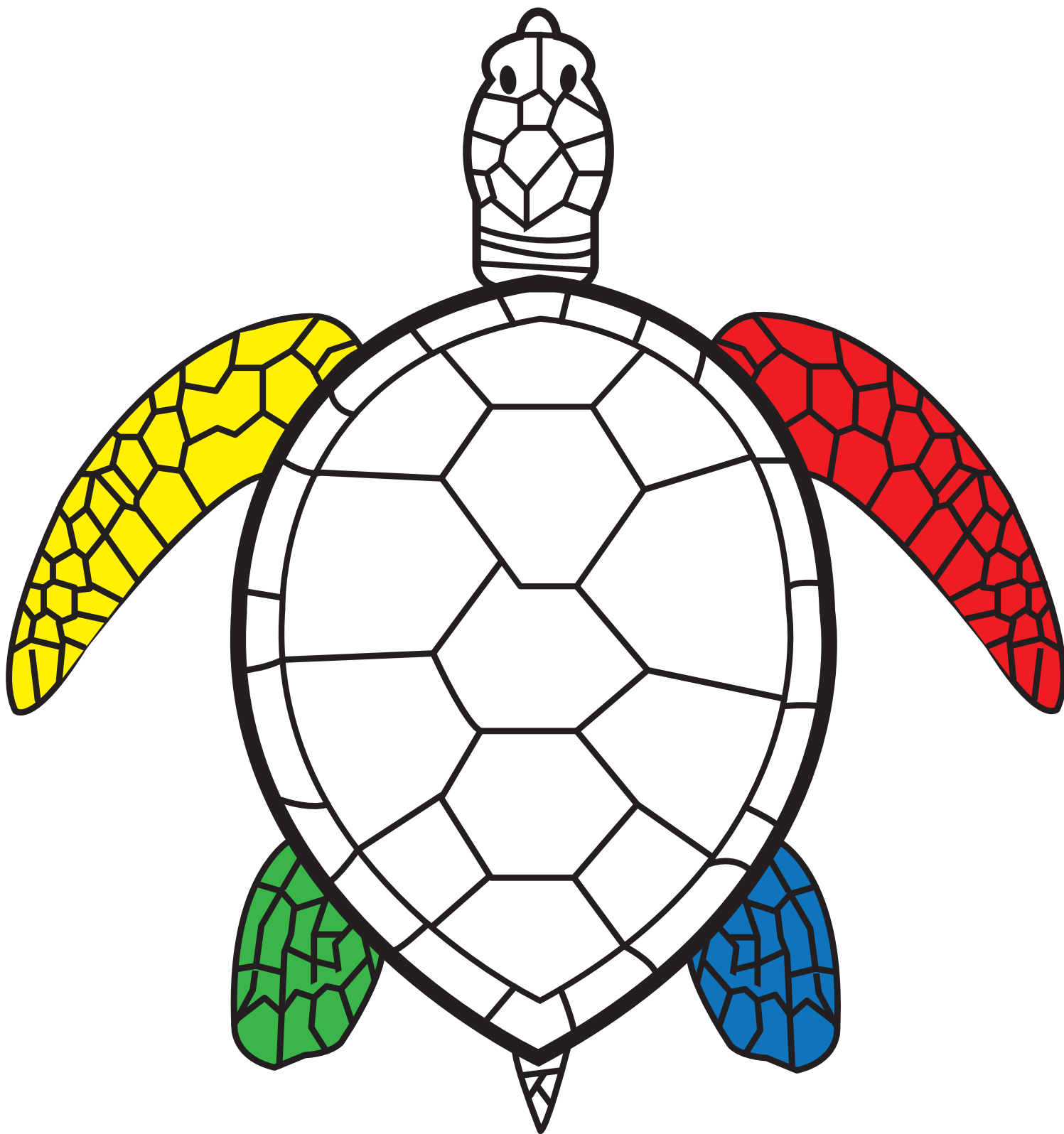
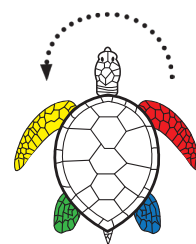
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RESOURCES & HELP

YouTube Resources

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RESOURCES & HELP

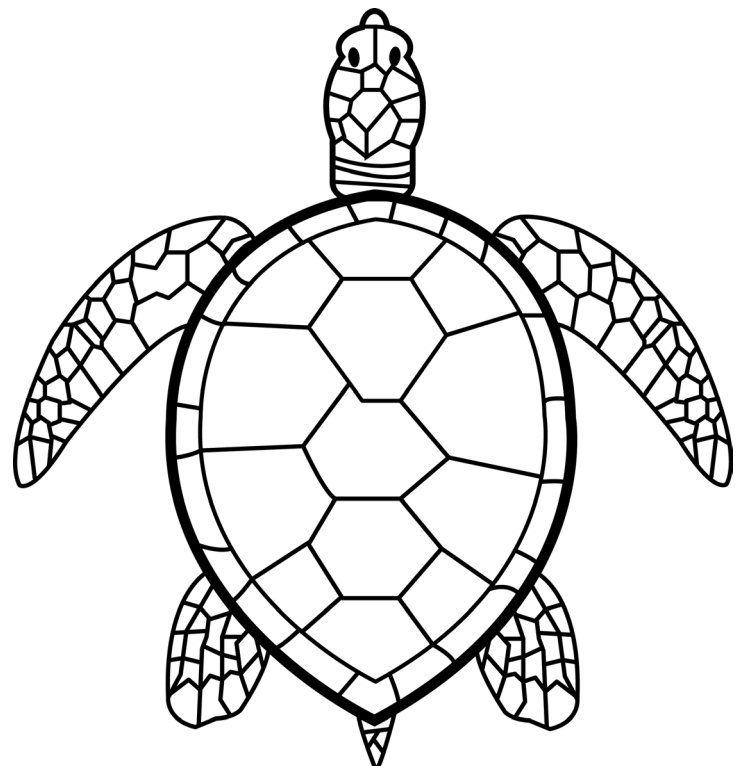
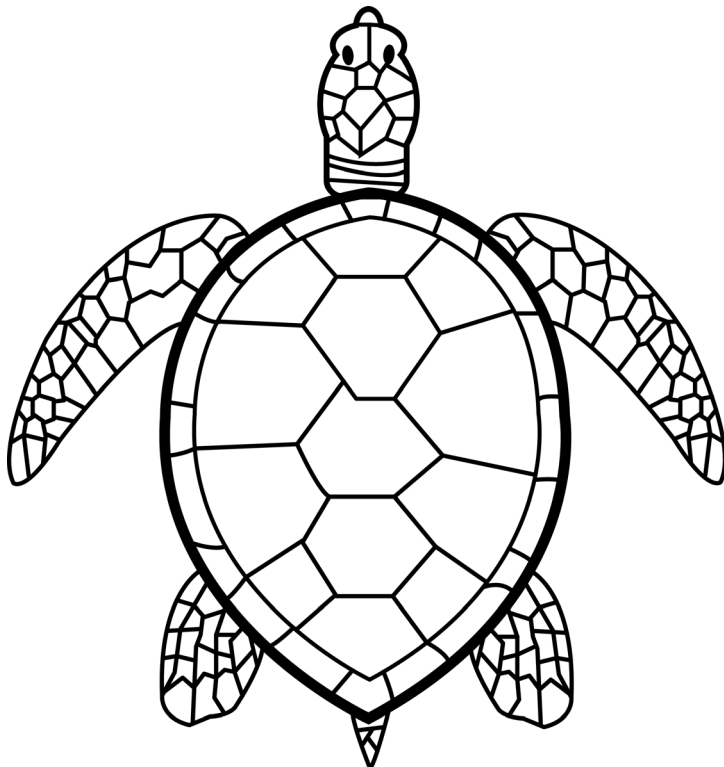
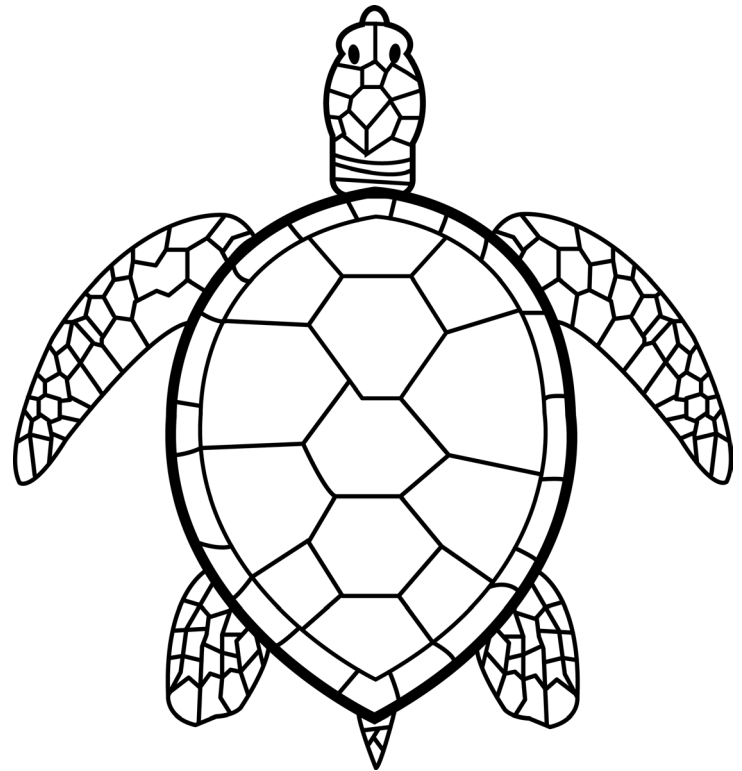
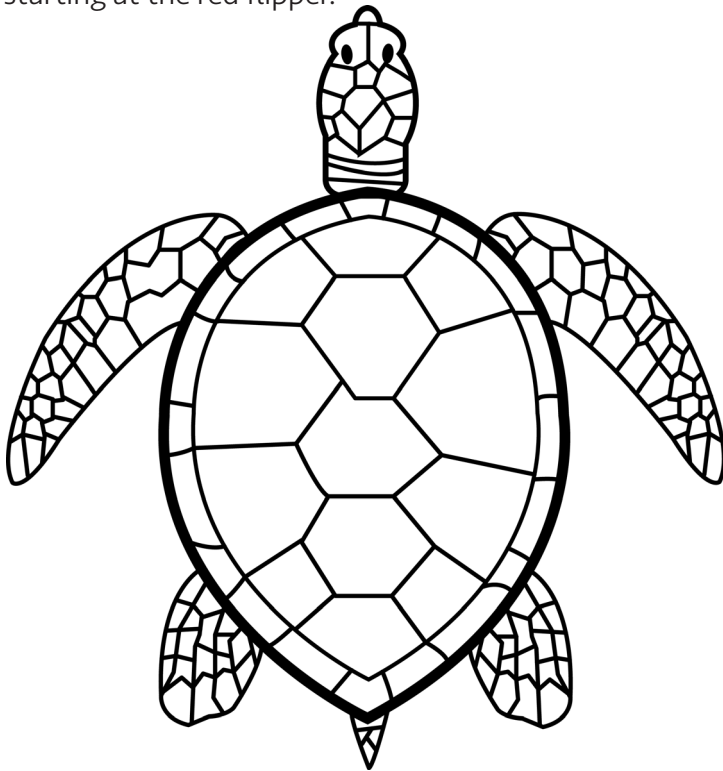
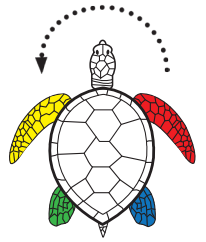
Additional Practice Sheets

Letter Formation: Draw A Turtle Shell

Here are some more practice sheets

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CHAPTER 3

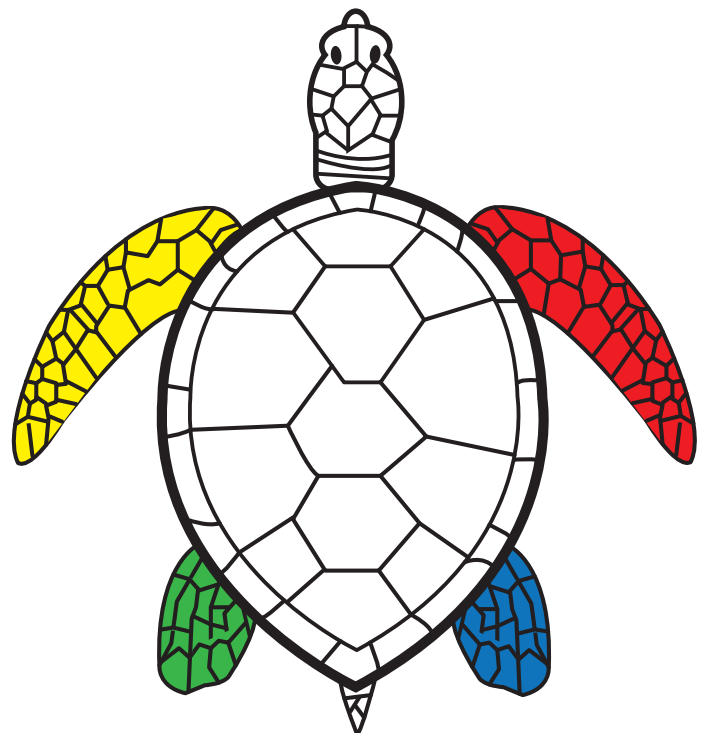
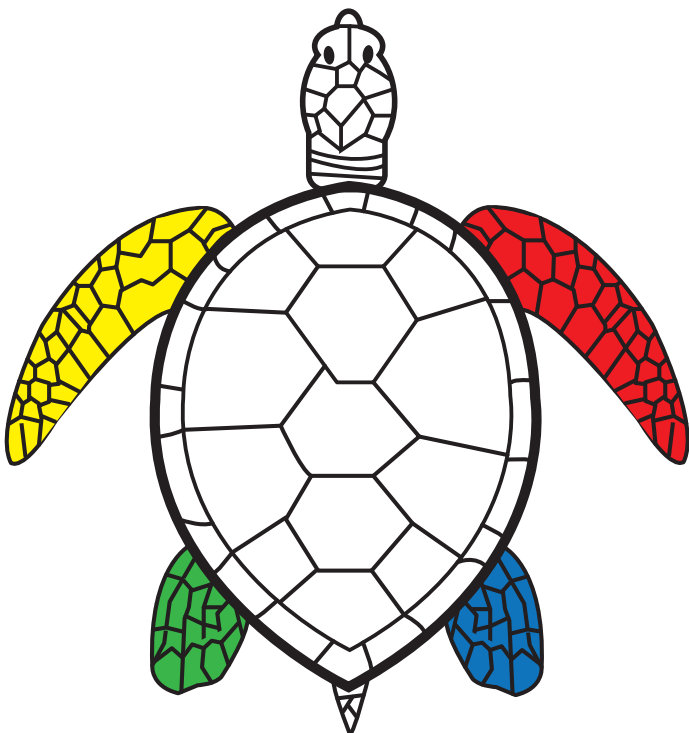
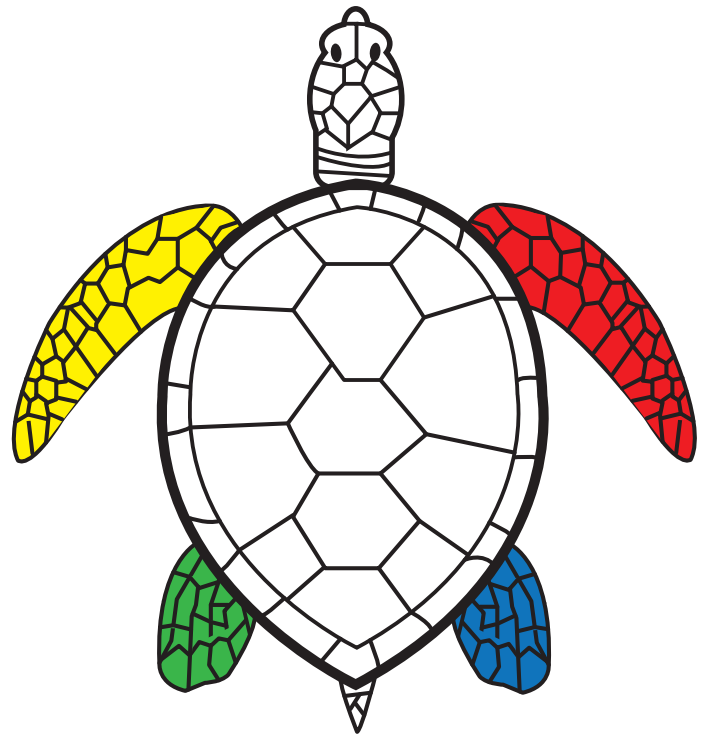
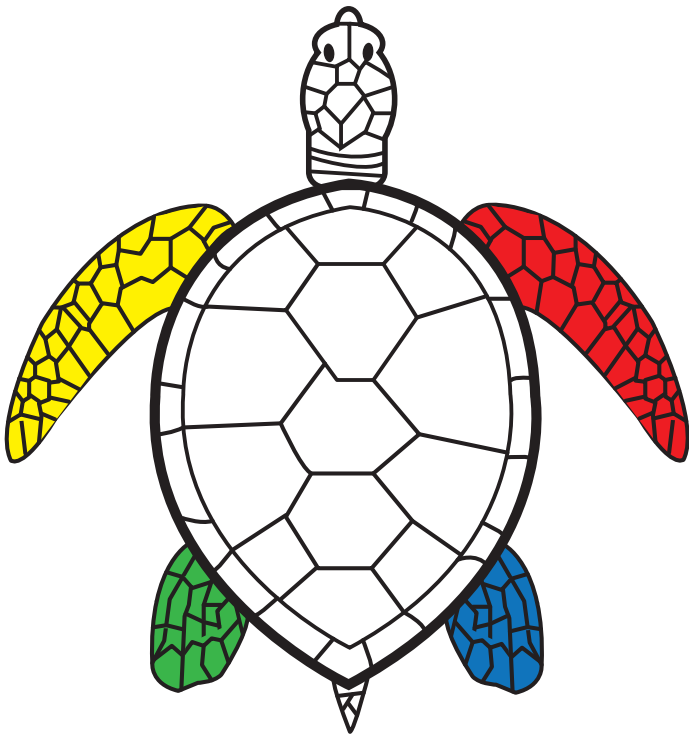
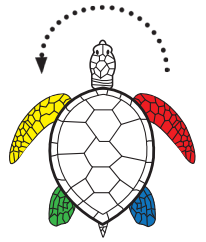
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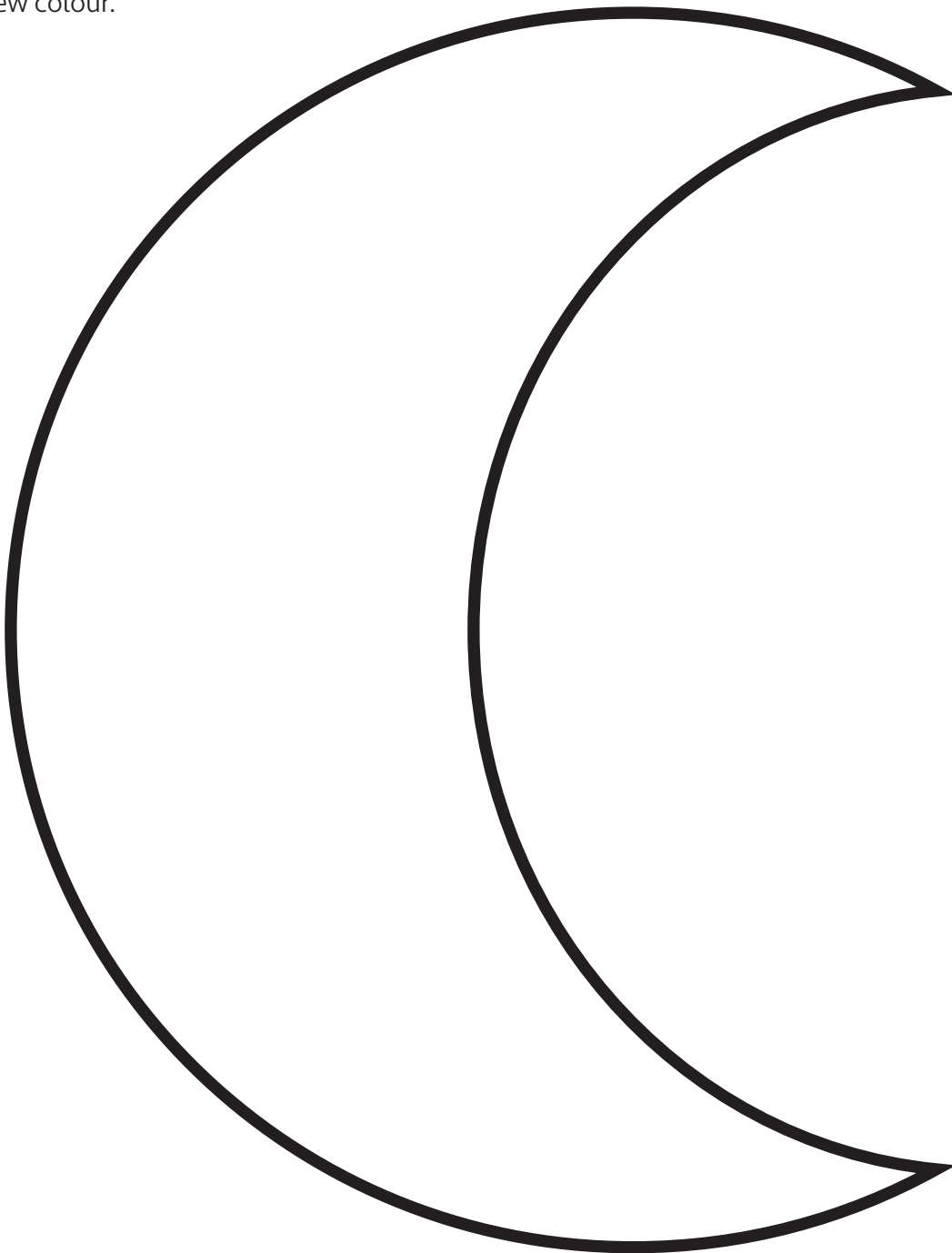
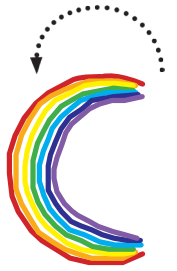
CHAPTER 3

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YouTube Resources

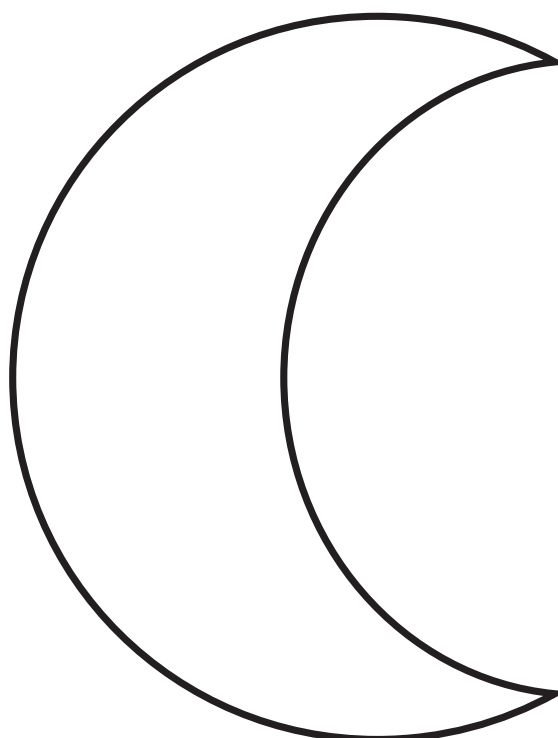
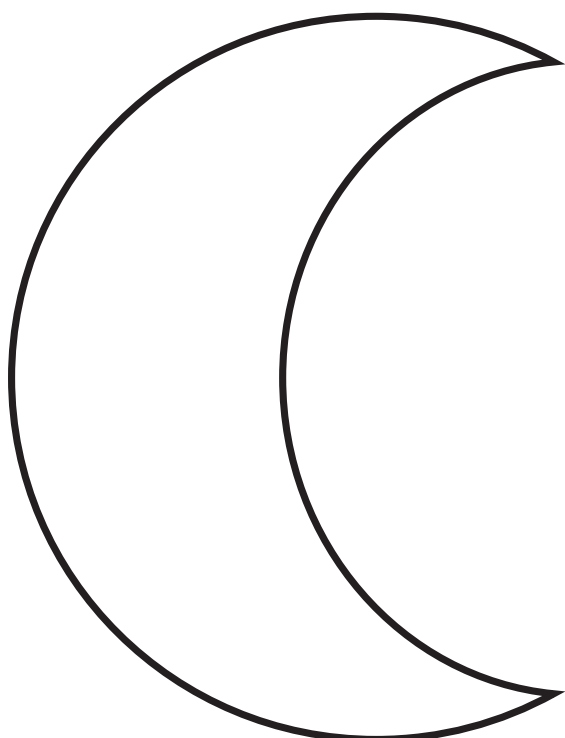
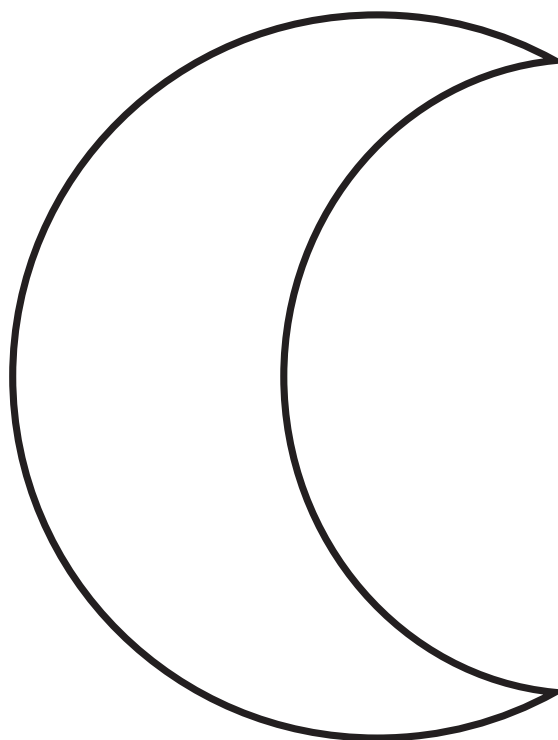
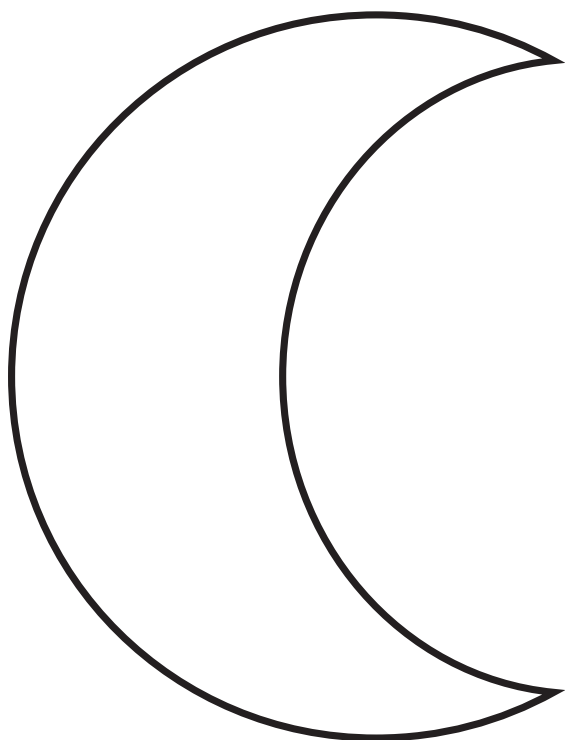
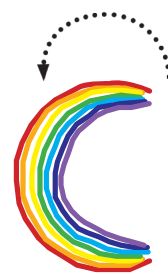
Letter Formation: Draw A Rainbow Moon

Using the colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, as shown in the YouTube video, ask your child to follow the curve of the moon in an anti-clockwise direction, starting at the top tip and moving inwards until they reach the bottom tip, with each new colour.



**CHAPTER 3****RESOURCES & HELP****Additional Practice Sheets****Letter Formation: Draw A Rainbow Moon****Here are some more practice sheets**

Using the colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, as shown in the YouTube video, ask your child to follow the curve of the moon in an anti-clockwise direction, starting at the top tip and moving inwards until they reach the bottom tip, with each new colour.





CHAPTER 3

RESOURCES & HELP

YouTube Resources

Letter Formation: Draw A Pirate

As shown in the YouTube video, ask your child to draw round the pirate's head in an anti-clockwise direction, starting at the skull and cross bones earring, moving past the hooped earring, down past the parrot and round to the knot of the bandana and back up to the start.





Additional Practice Sheets

Letter Formation: Draw A Pirate

Here are some more practice sheets

As shown in the YouTube video, ask your child to draw round the pirate's head in an anti-clockwise direction, starting at the skull and cross bones earring, moving past the hooped earring, down past the parrot and round to the knot of the bandana and back up to the start.





CHAPTER 3

RESOURCES & HELP

YouTube Resources

Syllables: Swap The Top

Use these images to cut in half as shown in the YouTube video in order to make new fantasy people and give your child syllable practice.
(pi-rate swapped with mer-maid = pi-maid & mer-rate)





CHAPTER 3

RESOURCES & HELP

YouTube Resources

Blending: Build A House

Ask your child to put stickers or counters on the following one syllable words in the picture as shown in the YouTube video:

d-oor, r-oof, g-ate, h-edge, p-ath, w-all, d-og, c-at, b-ike, s-ky, b-oy, g-irl, c-ar, p-lant.





Smiley Face Tracker

You can use this sheet in conjunction with the YouTube games or make up your own games to focus on each area of skill listed below.

Focus on one skill area a day (rhyme one day, syllables the next etc.) and practice this for 5 minutes.

Use this sheet with your child to track their progress and reward them with a prize once they fill up all the smiley faces on the chart.

Rhyme							
Syllables							
First Sound Awareness							
Blending							
Letter Formation							
Vocabulary							



CHAPTER 3

RESOURCES & HELP

Recommended Story Books

Here are some of our favourite books that we've been using in the clinic for ages to help children engage with rhyming, vocabulary, first sound awareness and syllable segmentation.

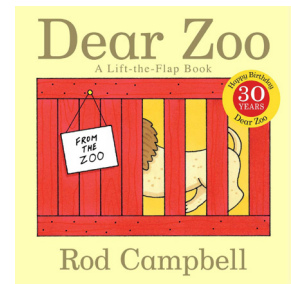
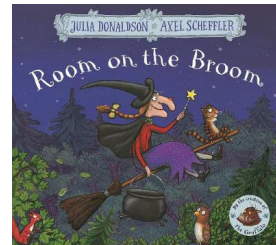
1. Room On The Broom

(I use this for: rhyming awareness)

Author: Julia Donaldson

Publisher: Macmillan Children's Books

[Link on Amazon](#)



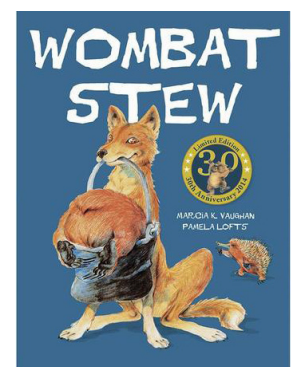
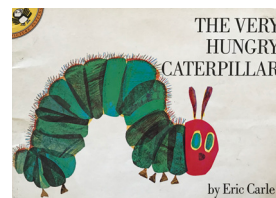
2. The Very Hungry Caterpillar

(I use this for: first sounds, syllable segmentation)

Author: Eric Carle

Publisher: Puffin Books

[Link on Amazon](#)



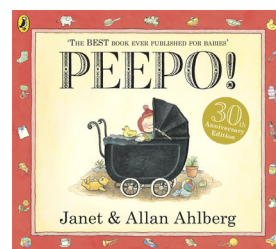
3. Peepo

(I use this for: rhyming awareness)

Author: Janet & Allan Ahlberg

Publisher: Puffin Books

[Link on Amazon](#)



4. Dear Zoo

(I use this for: vocabulary development)

Author: Rod Campbell

Publisher: Macmillan Children's Books

[Link on Amazon](#)

5. Wombat Stew

(I use this for: vocabulary development)

Author: Marcia Vaughan

Publisher: Macmillan Children's Books

[Link on Amazon](#)





CHAPTER 3

RESOURCES & HELP

If you are still concerned about your child's speech, language or early literacy development, these speech pathology associations should be able to provide you with guidance. Other professionals who may be of help are also listed.

Speech Pathology/Therapy Associations

Australia

SPA

(Speech Pathology Australia)

<https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au>

Canada

SAC

(Speech-Language & Audiology Canada)

<https://www.sac-oac.ca>

South Africa

SASLHA

(South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association)

<https://www.saslha.co.za>

UK

RCSLT

(Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists)

<https://www.rcslt.org>

USA

ASHA (American Speech-Hearing Association)

<https://www.asha.org>

Other Professionals

Other professionals that may form part of your child's investigative team, and/or multidisciplinary team may include the following:

- Audiologist
(hearing, auditory processing)
- Clinical Psychologist
(behaviour, anxiety)
- Educational Psychologist
(school-age children, cognitive and learning profiles)
- Occupational Therapist
(fine and gross motor skills, sensory integration)
- Optometrist
(vision, eye health, eye behaviours, tracking)
- Paediatrician
(development & medical diagnosis)
- Physiotherapist
(muscle tone, delayed motor skills)

This is a fairly typical list of common professionals that are often involved in children's care. It may be a useful starting point if you have any concerns regarding the words listed in brackets, below each professional.



Chapter 4



Glossary of Terms



There are lots of similar terms used when describing pre-literacy and early literacy skills: phonological, phonemic, phonetic, phonics. Hopefully the list below will help clear up any confusion!

Auditory Discrimination

This is the ability to listen to and decipher words that sound similar or have competing qualities. This is reliant upon accurate hearing and pronunciation and is essential for understanding and storing words correctly.

For example: sliver and slither (the /v/ and /th/ sound very similar but create completely different meanings).

Children with auditory processing difficulties or hearing loss can find this task difficult.

Blending

This is the ability to combine individual sounds (phonemic awareness) in the correct sequence, in order to make words. This is reliant upon accurate pronunciation as well as strong auditory memory.

For example: p - ar - k = park.

This is essential for accurate spelling and also represents how sounds and letters operate in print. The simplest form of blending starts with your child putting together the initial sound (onset) and remainder of a word (rime).

For example: p - ark = park

First Sound Awareness (Sound Identification)

This is the ability to detect and isolate the initial, middle or final sounds in words.

For example: cap starts with /c/ ends with /p/ and has the short vowel sound /a/ in the middle, whereas cape starts with /c/ ends with /p/ and has the long vowel sound /a/ in the middle.

Sound identification can be reinforced by playing games like "I spy with my little eye, something beginning with . . ."

Letter Formation

The 26 letters in the English alphabet are made up of circles and lines. Many have similar components, requiring the same fine motor patterns. In my YouTube videos and the worksheets provided in this eBook we focus only on circle drawing. This is because the anti-clockwise formation of circle letters, requires crossing the mid-line and is often the most difficult skill to master. It needs lots of practice and provides the building blocks for circle letter shapes, enabling your child to write the letters /a, c, d, f, g, o, q, s/.

In our more detailed, online program*, in addition to circle letters we cover short line, tall line and angled line letters. (***Literacy Fun-da-men-tools**)

Onset & Rime

This is the simplest form of blending. Onset refers to the initial sound and rime refers to the remainder of a word.

For example: m (onset) ouse (rime) = mouse.





Phonemic Awareness

This is the understanding that words are made from smaller units of sound, known as phonemes.

For example: cat is made of three distinct sounds, /c/ /a/ /t/, as is shark /sh/ /ar/ /k/.

This develops before letter recognition (phonics/grapheme-phoneme relationship) and is an important pre-literacy skill to master.

Phonics/Phonetic Alphabet/Grapheme-Phoneme

Phonics is based on the phonetic alphabet principle and is the *letter/grapheme to sound/phoneme* relationship which suggests that a particular letter shape can make a sound or sounds.

For example: the letter /a/ makes six different sounds in: apple, apricot, water, bath, many, swan.

The letter /b/ only makes one sound in: bath, rub, boat.

In order to read fluently, your child must have fast, accurate and stable phonic skills/letter recognition.

Phonological Awareness

This term refers to understanding the structure of spoken words, and uses auditory skills. It consists of: rhyming qualities of a word, syllable structures within a word, individual units of sound allowing for first sound identification and blending. A child's level of phonological awareness in kindergarten is one of the strongest predictors of future reading success.

Phonological awareness is also known as pre-literacy skills or as early literacy skills or phonological skills.

Rhyme

This is when two words sound the same with the exception of the first consonant(s).

For example: try / dry, car / star, hair / bear.

Research shows that rhyming skills by aged 3½ is a particularly sensitive measure of later reading acquisition, as it forms one important component of a child's phonological awareness skills. Children should be able to listen and identify rhyming words (input) and also generate rhyming strings (output) at pre-school age.

Syllables

These are the number of beats in a word. Each syllable is characterised by one unit of sound, with or without surrounding consonants. Every syllable typically contains at least one vowel, but syllables often have more than one vowel.

For example: frog = one syllable, ap-ple = two syllables, u-ni-corn = three syllables.

Research shows that a child's ability to segment words into their syllable parts by aged 3½ gives them a head start when they come to school, as they can make sense of the length and structure of words.

