



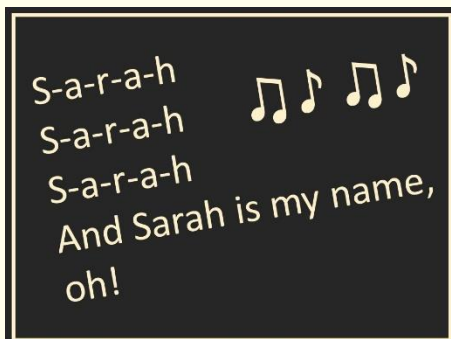
Name games – teaching phonics, syllables and reading long words

Often the first words children learn to recognise, read and spell are their own names. It's not surprising as these words hold significant meaning and power for them. Why not harness that energy to teach the skills that are basic to literacy development?

Even before they begin formal schooling, most children are able to read and spell their own names; and possibly the names of significant others in their lives, including parents, siblings, other close relatives and friends. When they see their names written on pictures they've drawn, inside the covers of books they own, on letters and cards written to them, as well as on their belongings, they come to understand "that word means me".

However, not all children are exposed to the same opportunities for learning prior to beginning school. It is therefore important to ensure we make connections with where they are at in their development and help them learn in ways that are both fun and meaningful.

I can spell my name in song



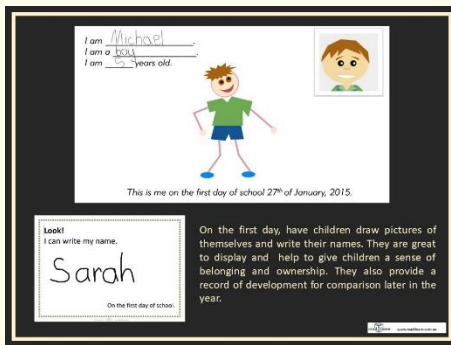
An easy way to teach young children to recite the letters of their names in sequence, is to utilise their love of music, singing and recall of lyrics. Even if you sing out of key, children enjoy special songs about them and their names. Simply adjust the tune of B-I-N-G-O to the children's names as you sing. After just a few repetitions, they are able to join in, and even sing their names independently. If you sing as they watch while you write their names, they will begin to recognise and name each letter too.

Who is here?



A simple way of finding out who can recognise their name in print is to make a Who is here? chart. Laminate a large copy of each child's name and put a small amount of removable adhesive on the back. As children enter in the morning they find their names and place them on the chart. This is also an easy check to see who is and is not at school. Children quickly learn to recognise each other's names too. It doesn't take long for children to learn to recognise their own and each other's names.

Who am I?

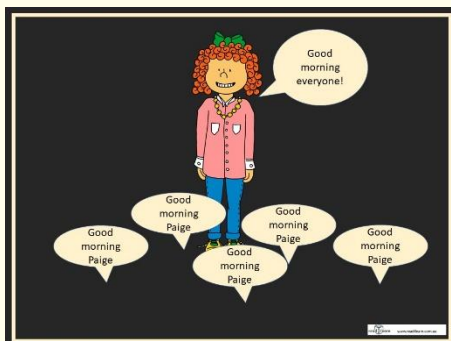


A great activity for the first day of school is to ask the children to [write their names](#) or to [draw pictures](#) of themselves and write their names on it.

These make a wonderful display and help to give children a sense of belonging and ownership.

They provide immediate information about development as well as a record for comparison later in the year.

Getting to know each other

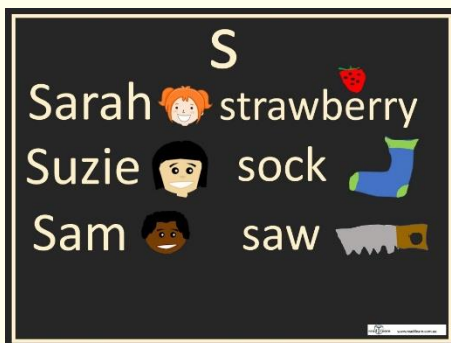


Calling the attendance roll is a great way of helping children get to know each other's names. Even if you are no longer required to do the roll orally, the benefits of doing so remain.

You say the child's name. The child stands and says, "Good morning, everyone." The class says, "Good morning, (name)."

After a little while, the children get to know the order and you don't need to say their names. It's great fun and good for their memories.

Words that begin like my name



When you are introducing children to the sounds and names of the letters, if possible use the names of the children. For example, the first letter introduced often is "S". You might have a Steven, Sam, Sarah or Sacha in your class.

Explain that today is going to be; for example, Sarah's day, and that you are going to think of as many words as you can that begin like Sarah. Discuss the letter name and sound and display the letter on a chart. Write Sarah's name at the top of the chart, say her name, the letter and the sound.

As children suggest words that begin with the letter, write them onto the chart. Illustrate with a small drawing if possible. (They don't need to be brilliant.)

Alternatively, have a stock of sticky notepapers. When the child tells you the name of something (noun) for example; *sausage, saw, sock, scissors*, write the word on a sticky notepaper. When the brainstorming session is finished give the children a word to illustrate. Add the sticky notepapers to the chart.

Another suggestion for using the first letter and sound of a child's name is by giving them an [alliterative positive description](#); for example, *Sensational Sarah, Terrific Trey, Brave Brandon, Likeable Liam*. Children could illustrate these with a self-portrait.

Additional activities

Children find a partner whose name:

- starts with the same letter, or
- has the same number of letters.

Children could work with the partner to list words that begin with their initials.

Words that rhyme with my name

Some of the children may have names for which you can find rhyming words. Sometimes the spelling of these names and words is regular. Sometimes it is irregular. Either way provides opportunities for teaching and learning.

Children's names we can rhyme - examples

One-syllable names may be easiest

Jim Kim Kym Tim dim him limb prim rim slim swim trim whim

Blake Jake bake cake drake fake hake lake make rake sake steak stake
shake take wake

Trey Jay Kay Kaye bay cay cray dray fray grey gray hey hay lay may nay
pay pray play ray stay say sleigh slay tray way

Brooke book, cook, crook, chook, hook, look, nook, rook, sook, took
but rhymes may be possible with some longer names; for example:

Molly Holly Polly Wally broolly dolly folly golly lolly trolley

Kristen piston (note: glisten and listen are spelled similarly but don't rhyme)

Notice that in even these few examples, spelling irregularities exist.

Investigate grapho-phonics and spelling with one-syllable names

Investigating the letter and letter combinations used to spell one-syllable names is a great way of introducing both regular and irregular spelling patterns, especially for long vowel sounds, consonant blends and digraphs. It is likely that with a class of approximately 25 students, a great number of both regular and irregular spelling patterns will be present.

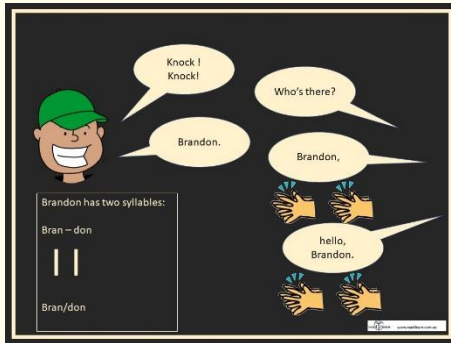
You may be able to discuss:

- CVC words; for example, *Pam, Ben, Tim, Tom*.
- Long vowels with 'e' on the end: for example, *Jane, Luke, Rose, Eve*.
- Other spellings of long vowels, digraphs and blends; such as, *Trey, Jean, Bryce, Brooke, Hugh, Sloane*.

Introducing syllabification

The knock-knock syllable name game

This activity could build upon the attendance activity *Getting to know each other* suggested above, or could be an activity on its own. Children sit or stand in a circle. The teacher nominates who will be first, then children take turns around the circle.



Child: Knock! Knock!

Class: Who's there?

Child: (Name; for example, Brandon)

Class: Brandon, hello, Brandon (Clapping the syllables of *Brandon* each time.)

Teacher: How many claps?

Class: Two.

Supporting and extension activities

Use these activities when children understand the concept of syllabification:

- Teacher (or children) draws tallies for each of the names as they are said.
- Children form groups, or make a living graph, based on the number of syllables in their names. Compare and discuss.
- Children find another whose name has the same number of syllables for a paired activity.

Breaking words into syllables

Breaking words into syllables - starting with names

Each syllable has a vowel or vowel group and maybe some consonants.

Rule 1: Break between the two middle consonants if they make separate sounds.

Bran/don

Rule 2: Break before a single middle consonant or consonant digraph, even when it changes the first vowel sound.

Ro/bert

Rule 3: Do the same for words with three or more syllables.

Me/la/nie

It is always best to start with the familiar and build on that understanding. Teaching syllabification using children's names makes perfect sense. They are already well-practised at listening to the names and breaking them into chunks orally. Breaking them into chunks visually builds upon that foundation and is an excellent way of introducing syllabification as a tool for reading multi-syllable words.

Understanding syllabification requires knowledge of both vowel and consonants sounds, including letters that join together to make one sound (digraphs) such as; *th* and *sh*, *ai* and *oo*; and blends (two or more letters that blend but retain their separate sounds; like, *bl* and *sm*). They will already have been introduced to these through working with one-syllable names and other words. When you are working with these two-syllable names and words, each syllable can be treated individually for purposes of analysis.

Words are usually broken into syllables in regular ways:

- *between two middle consonants*; for example, Bran/don
- *before a single middle consonant*; for example, Ro/bert; even when the consonant changes the vowel sound; for example, Sa/rah.

The same is true for three syllables names too; such as, My/kay/la, Me/la/nie and Bar/thol/o/mew.

When looking at other words, you will find ways of breaking into syllables that don't often occur in names; such as:

- *between words in compound words*; for example, house/boat
- *before the consonant sound preceding *le**; for example, mum/ble, a/ble, ti/ckle

Of course, as with much in English, there are always exceptions to any rule.

How to begin

- Begin by writing a child's name on the board and ask the children to say the name, and count and clap the syllables. The easiest to start with are those with two middle consonants; such as Brandon.
- Emphasise the syllables as you say them and draw a line between them; for example, Bran/don.

While this simple activity provides many opportunities for teaching phonics and spelling patterns, you won't want to do it all in one day. Pace the work according to children's development and interest.

Repeat the activity with other names that fit the pattern, and then present some similarly structured words. Ask children to identify where the words break into syllables. Point out how much easier it is to read the words if they know where to break them. It makes it just like reading two small words. Look at what's available for discussion with just Brandon's name:

The short vowel sounds: *a* and *o*; the consonants: *n* and *d*; the blend: *br*.

Examples of other names and words with a similar structure to *Brandon* include: *Milly, Kristen, Lachlan, Chelsey, hammer, Santa, sister, fifteen, candy, winter, doctor, welcome, ending, problem*.

Introduce other rules

When children are confident breaking between two middle consonants, or when they raise other words for discussion, introduce other syllabification rules; for example: if there is only one consonant sound (including digraph or blend), it usually breaks before the consonant; as in *Robert*.

Examples of other names and words with a similar structure to *Robert* include: *Michael, Peter, Hayley, Shanai, Tema, Cooper, Jordon, today, seven, again, over, city, sugar, Friday*.

I'm sure once you get started using names to teach phonics and syllabification for reading longer words, you'll find many more ways of incorporating them into your program.