

Handwriting/Decoding Station

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Alphabet Wall Cards



Although this section is meant to describe the activities that take place at the fifth of the five learning stations, the Alphabet Wall Cards are not a station activity. Rather, they are a material used for the whole-class lessons that precede work through at this last station.

On the day the teacher is ready to begin the handwriting activities, the whole class is introduced to the letters **a**, **b**, and **c**. The Alphabet Wall Cards for these three letters are introduced one at a time. The procedure used with each Card is the same. The teacher posts the Wall Card in a space that is clearly visible to all of the students. Then the teachers has all the children hold their hands out at arm's length and trace the letter in the air with their index and middle fingers.

The tracing starts at the blue dot, follows the blue line, starts again at the orange dot, and follows the orange line. As the children trace the letter in the air, they say, "Blue...orange" to indicate the color of the line they are then tracing.

Teacher: "Look at this letter. I want you to trace this letter in the air with your fingers, like this." (Teacher demonstrates the arm out-stretched, two-finger approach.)

"Start at the blue dot, follow the blue line all the way around, then start again at the orange dot and follow that line too. Say the colors you are tracing as you trace them. Ready...begin."

Children: "Blue...orange."

Teacher: "Again."

Children: "Blue...orange."

Teacher: "Again...."

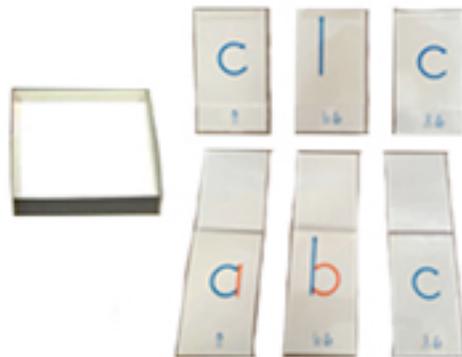
The children continue tracing the letter in the air as often as the teacher says, "Again". The teacher watches to see that each child understands what is expected of him or her. As many "Agains" are said as it takes the teacher to judge each child's understanding of tracing letters in the air.

When the children have mastered air-tracing, they trace the shape of the letter in the palm of their hand. Once again, they start with the blue dot, use two fingers as their writing instrument, and say "Blue...orange" to identify the parts of the letter they are tracing.

The children always say "Blue...orange". They do not say the name of the letter. The object of the lesson is to allow each child to internalize the formation of each letter. The children are learning the shape of each letter and how to draw it. Naming the shape is not important at this time. It only distracts the child's attention from the learning at hand.

When the children have finished tracing the letter **a** in the air and on their palms, they repeat the above procedures for **b** and then **c**. These three letters will be enough to carry them through their first day's activities at their new learning station. Once the station has been introduced, additional letters are added to the letters that the students are learning to write at the rate of about one or two a day. Each new letter is always introduced in the same whole-class manner of tracing in the air and tracing on palms as was used to introduce **a**, **b**, and **c**.

Letter Sequence Flipbooks and Salt Trays



Activities at the other four learning stations are closely related to one another. A child who is introduced to two-sound words at the Picture Packet Station may also expect to encounter two-sound words at the Worksheet, Book, and Stamping Stations. There is no corresponding two-sound material at the Handwriting Station. When new materials are introduced at the Handwriting Station, they are introduced to all of the children at once. No distinction is made as to the level at which a child may be working until the faster learners are introduced to the Decoding Charts.

The handwriting activities replace the puzzles at the last of the preliminary learning stations. The first of the handwriting materials to be

introduced at this station are the Letter Sequence Flipbooks and their accompanying salt trays.

The salt trays are not provided with the reading kit because they are easily made by the teacher. All that is required is one shallow box for each group member working at the station. If the largest learning group has six members, then six salt boxes are needed. Good boxes to use are the boxes in which ditto masters come. These boxes are relatively flat, easily stored, and equipped with lids to keep the salt from spilling when the boxes are stacked for storage. There should be enough salt in the box to cover the bottom of the box to a depth of between 1/4 and 1/2 inches. Sand works just as well as salt.

On the first day, the children are to use the Flipbooks, the teacher sits at the Handwriting Station as each successive group rotates through, to make sure everyone has adequate instruction in the use of the new materials. Since only three letters were presented in the whole-class lesson, there will not yet be enough Flipbooks for each student to have his or her own individual book from which to draw letters. Three letters are enough to begin with, however, since all the members of each group can use the same Flipbook as the teacher presents the letter drawing routine.

Each Flipbook has the first line or curve of a letter printed in blue on its first page. When the page is flipped up, the full letter is shown with its second line or curve printed in orange. The Flipbooks are used to guide children in which part of a letter is drawn first, which part second, and so on. The dot at the beginning of the blue and orange lines indicates to the children where they are to begin when drawing that line. An occasional letter takes more than two lines to draw. For these letters, the third and/or fourth lines are also colored blue and orange, and arrows indicate their appropriate starting points.

The salt trays are the drawing boards for the letters. The children look at the first page of the Flipbook and use their fingers to draw its line or curve in the salt. They then flip to the next page and add the letter's finishing line(s). When the letter is drawn, the salt is erased by gently shaking the box back and forth until the drawing material absorbs the drawing. Another Flipbook is then selected, and the process is repeated.

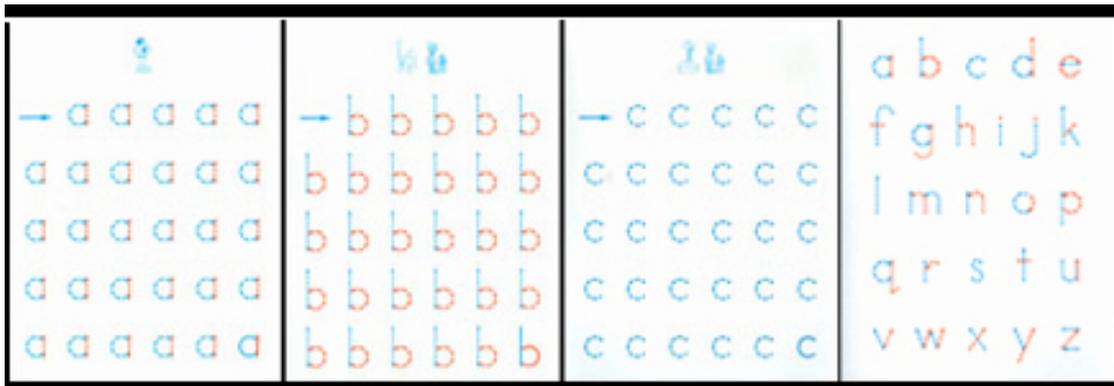
On the first day at the Handwriting Station, the teacher holds a Flipbook for the learning group to see, watches as each student draws the line from the first page in the salt, then flips to the next page and watches again for what happens. When one letter has been drawn, students erase their trays, and the teacher presents the next letter. When all three letters have been drawn, the cycle is repeated, beginning again with the first letter.

Before the groups begin their second day at the Handwriting Station, they are introduced to two or three additional letters. When the Flipbooks for these letters are added to the station, there are enough Flipbooks available for sets of two children to share a letter to draw. They share the Flipbooks, but they each do their own drawing in their own salt tray. By the third day, there are enough letters introduced that each student may have his or her own Flipbook from which to draw.

The children may practice any of the letters they wish, repeating any they

wish as often as they please. No record is kept of which children have practiced which letters. If subsequent assessments indicate a child needs specific practice on one or two particular letters, the teacher may assign that child the appropriate Flipbooks as his or her station activity for a day or two.

Letter Writing Worksheets



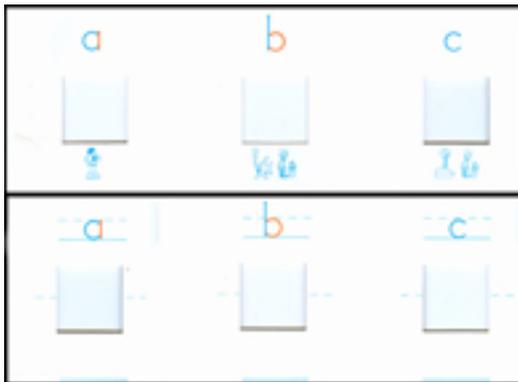
While the handwriting activities do not relate directly to the activities being conducted at the other learning stations, the introduction of new materials at the Handwriting Station is, nevertheless, loosely correlated with the addition of new activities at the other stations. The Letter Sequence Flipbooks are introduced when the children are, collectively, still at the two-sound level of activities. The Letter Writing Worksheets are introduced about the same time as the fastest learners reach the three-sound level of activities.

Whereas the three-sound activities are only used by the students who have been assessed as ready for that level, the Letter Writing Worksheets, once introduced, are to be used by any and all of the members of each group who may wish to use them.

The Letter Writing Worksheets are not meant to replace the Letter Sequence Flipbooks and the salt trays. They are meant to expand the writing materials available to the children. Students may choose from either the Flipbooks or the worksheets when they are working at the Handwriting Station.

Because all of the letters have usually been introduced by the time any students reach the three-sound level, all of the Letter Writing Worksheets may be added to the Handwriting Station at once. Since the members of each learning group already know how to write on and erase worksheets, the teacher need not spend much time explaining how the worksheets are to be used. The worksheets simply transfer the drawing each child has been doing in salt to tracing with a marking pen. The child follows the blue and then the orange lines on the worksheet with his or her marking pen. When the worksheet is completed, a moist rag is used to erase it, and a new worksheet is selected.

Letter Writing Templates - Unlined and Lined



When the fastest learners begin work at the phrase level of the program, the Letter Writing Templates are introduced. The Letter Writing Templates are two sets of activities in one. The unlined templates occupy one side of each card, and the lined templates are on the reverse. The students are first introduced to the easier unlined templates and then switched to the more advanced lined version when use of the earlier version has been mastered.

To use either side of the template, the student sets the template down on a piece of paper and copies the letter printed above the square hole onto the paper visible through the hole.

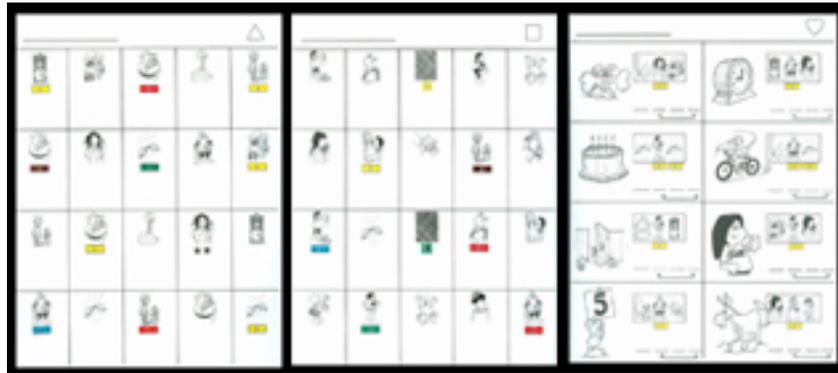
The templates serve as an assessment of how well the children have learned to write letters from their earlier handwriting activities. The children use the templates to write letters. The teacher looks at the written letters and decides which children need more help from the Flipbooks and/or worksheets. Children who can write the letters well are told to turn the templates over for practice at writing the letters on lined paper.

The Blackline Masters contain a master for lined paper. This master is for use in classrooms where the lined paper available does not match up with the lines on the lined side of the Letter Writing Templates.

Children do not need to practice every letter an equal amount of time to be able to write every letter equally well. There are only a few basic strokes used in forming letters. Over the course of the months that the students work at the Handwriting Station, each student will receive ample practice in writing each letter many times over. If letters are, by chance, overlooked, the teacher's assessment will pick up any weak spots.

Decoding Charts and Decoding Chart Practice Worksheets

The introduction of the Decoding Charts and the Practice Worksheets marks the first time students at the Handwriting Station are given separate materials based on the level at which they are working. The only children presented Decoding Charts are those few who are about to begin the transition level activities at each of the other stations.



The Decoding Charts and their Practice Worksheets are introduced at the Handwriting Station one or two days before the transition level materials are first introduced at the Picture Packet Station. The first children in class to receive instruction in the use of the Decoding Charts are not apt to have any difficulty understanding how to use them. These first children are the fastest learners in class. It is their quickness at understanding that caused them to be the first to use the Charts. Their gift for learning quickly won't leave them just as they reach the transition level. Their modeling of how to use the Charts will make it easy for all who follow to catch on quickly, as well.

This is a white triangle worksheet:



The sounds on the Decoding Chart are laid out in the same manner as are the Wall Sound Cards, the Sound Review cards, and the stamp trays. The color codings indicate to the child which spelling is to be used to write the letters for a word.

We will use the first word on this worksheet as an example of how the Decoding Chart and its assorted color codings are to be used by the child.

Look at the first word and its codings. The  sound has a yellow rectangle beneath it. Look for the  on the Decoding Chart. What letters are in the yellow space directly beneath the  on the chart? Those letters are written on the line beneath the sound in the worksheet.



Now, look at the second sound in the word . This sound has no rectangle beneath it. When a sound has no accompanying color coding, the first, or the white, spelling that appears beneath the sound on the Decoding Chart is the one to be used. Look for the  on the Decoding Chart. What letter is in the white, or first, spelling space directly beneath the  on the Chart? This letter is written on the line beneath the sound on the worksheet.



You have now used a Decoding Chart to translate a word written with sound pictures to a word written in our traditional alphabet. That's almost all there is to it. Before you become a Decoding Chart expert, however, there are two other decoding rules you need to know.

Look at the second word on the worksheet. The  sound has no coding beneath it, so look on the Decoding Chart for the first, or the white spelling of . This spelling is written in the appropriate space beneath the  in the word.



Now, look at the second sound in the word. This sound has no color coding beneath it, so the rule about using the first, or white spelling on the Decoding Chart still applies. Look on the Decoding Chart and find the white spelling for the  sound. The two black stars that appear beneath the  in the word indicate that the spelling is to be written twice. So, whatever spelling you find in the white space beneath the  on the Decoding Chart is to be written twice in the appropriate space.



You now know two of the rules for using a Decoding Chart. There is only one more rule to learn. Before I teach you that rule, however, I would like to explain the little numbers that you will already have noticed appear inside the color-coding rectangles on the worksheets. All the yellow rectangles on all the worksheets have a **2** in them. All the red rectangles contain a **3**. All the blue rectangles contain a **4**, and so on. There are no **1** codings, because a **1** is assumed if no other number is present. The numbers simply indicate whether the spelling to be used is the second, the third, the fourth, and so on. The number codings are equivalent to the color codings.

Color codings are used as children first begin writing letter spellings for the sounds they have learned. The colors are much easier for children to use when figuring out which letters to copy from the chart to their worksheets or other writing lessons. Numbers involve students in having to count down a specific number of spaces before selecting the appropriate spelling. Colors draw the child's attention immediately to the correct spelling to be used.

As students become increasingly familiar with their Decoding Charts, number references are gradually introduced. In addition to the fact that numbers offer immediate assistance to children who are color blind, the eventual use of numbers offers at least two other advantages. First, the use of numbers means that if the teacher wishes to stamp something out for children to read and then write, the coding can be added with just a pencil or a pen. A full set of crayons is not needed. Second, if a worksheet is to be used as a take-home activity, numbers don't need to be copied in color.

The color coding makes it easier for children to learn to use the Decoding

Charts quickly and effectively. Once the use of the Charts becomes familiar to the children, it is of benefit to the teacher to rely increasingly on the number codes. Numbers are included as a part of each coding from the outset to make the transition from colors to numbers a smooth one.

We will use a word from the white square worksheet to learn the third and final rule for working with the Decoding Chart.



Neither the  nor the  have any colored rectangles beneath them, so we already know to look on the Decoding Chart for the first, or white spelling for each of these sounds.



Sound-pictures are a highly effective method of allowing children to learn to read because they reduce the complexity of the task into manageable units. Traditional teaching methods can overwhelm the child from the very beginning with too much that is confusing. When children are ready to transition from sound-pictures to traditional letters, however, the complexities must gradually be reintroduced. In this program, the introduction of the factors that make learning to read difficult are not introduced until after the child has achieved a high level of confidence in his or her ability to read sound-pictures.

One of the unique aspects of written words that children do not have to experience as they are learning to read with the sound-pictures is that letters in some words don't make any sounds. The **L** in the word **walk** does not represent a sound. The word could just as well be spelled **wawk**, only we would no longer recognize it, because we are too used to the silent **L** to do without it now.

As students begin the transition from reading with sound pictures to reading words written in our traditional alphabet, they must also begin learning about the silent letters tucked away in so many of our words. When a silent letter occurs in a word, the Decoding Chart offers the students a way of adding the soundless letter to their writing. Look at the illustration above again.

The shaded rectangle at the end of the word is a space holder used to

indicate the absence of a sound and the presence of a spelling. When children are learning to read sounds, they are told that the shaded rectangle does not stand for any sound. When children are learning how to use their Decoding Charts, they are still taught that the shaded area does not represent a sound, but that it does represent a letter, a letter that, in this case, has no sound.

All the letters of the alphabet appear along the bottom of each Decoding Chart. A unique symbol is printed above each letter. The symbols are also enclosed in a colored rectangle (white, yellow, red, blue, green, brown or purple). The purpose of the colors is to make it easier for the students to find the symbol. In the example above, the large black dot below the shaded area on the worksheet is enclosed in a small yellow rectangle. The yellow allows the child to narrow his or her search for the symbol to just the four silent letter shapes on the Decoding Chart that are enclosed in yellow. Use of color to assist children in finding the symbols more quickly is phased out at the same time as children switch from colors to numbers in finding the spellings for the sound pictures.

Now, let's finish writing the word in the example above. The shaded area has a large black dot beneath it. Find this coding symbol among the row of symbols on the bottom of your Decoding Chart. What letter is printed directly beneath this symbol? This letter is written beneath the symbol in the word we are learning to write.

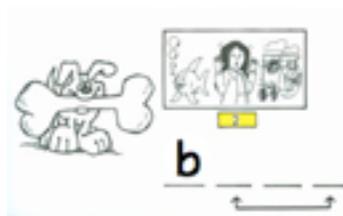


The Decoding Chart Practice Worksheets are the materials used to teach the students these three rules. When the teacher determines that some children are ready to begin work at the transition level of the program, these few children are pulled temporarily from their regular learning groups and given a special lesson on using the Decoding Charts. The presentation consists of showing the children the Decoding Chart, demonstrating how it is to be used, giving each child his or her own chart, and then watching as the children use the chart to write letters for sounds on the Practice Worksheets, one geometric coding level at a time.

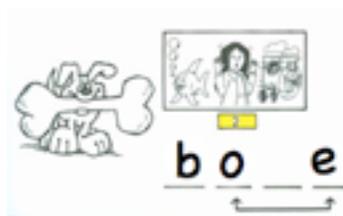
The Practice Worksheets coded with the heart are reserved for teaching the students the fourth rule for using the Decoding Charts. Earlier, I indicated that there were only three rules a child needed to know before he or she could begin using the Decoding Chart as a tool in transitioning out of the Reading Program. The fourth rule is really only an elaboration of an earlier rule for how the spellings are to be written below the sounds. As an example:



The 🐶 sound has no coding beneath it, so we look for its first, or white, spelling on the Decoding Chart and write that spelling on the appropriate line in the word.



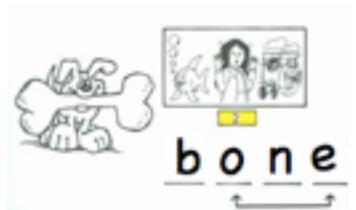
The 👩 sound has a yellow coding beneath it. Look on your Decoding Chart for the yellow spelling of the 👩 sound. Unlike the letters for the red or blue or green spellings of this same sound, the two letters used as the yellow spelling are not immediately next to each other. The letters for the yellow spelling have a space between them. They also have a double-headed arrow passing beneath them. This arrow is rule number four. It tells the children to write the yellow spelling for 👩 like this:



The arrows on the Decoding Chart provide a good hint as to where the letters are to be written. The worksheet also has a convenient extra line at the end of the word with no picture sound placed above it. Children who reach the transition level of the program have no trouble assimilating the meaning of the arrows. They can write the second, or yellow, spelling for 👩 or 🐶 as easily as they can write the yellow spelling for 👩.

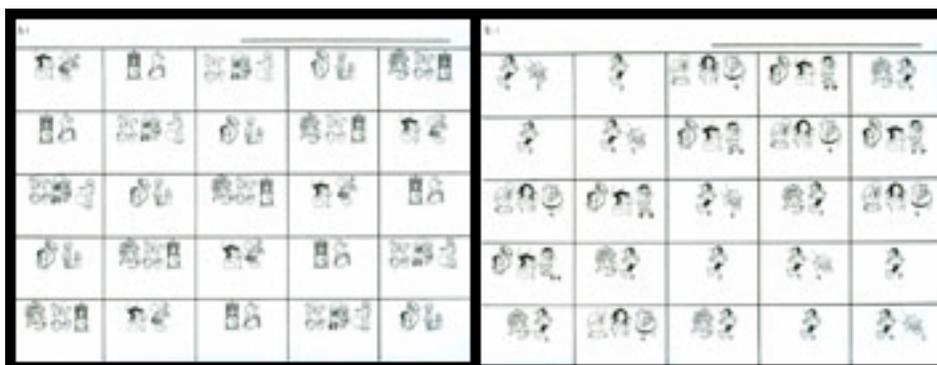
Let's finish the word we've started to write. The one remaining sound is 🐶. Since there is no coding beneath the sound, look for its first or white

spelling on your Decoding Chart. The finished word is written like this:



When the students complete the Decoding Chart Practice Worksheets, they return to their regular learning groups. These few students are now ready to begin both the Two-Sound Transition Worksheets and the Sight Word Worksheets.

Sight Word Worksheets



The Sight Word Worksheets present one hundred fifty-six different words that make up a majority of the words beginning readers might be required to read or write. Knowing how to write and read these words prepares students for their creative writing efforts. Children who must stop frequently to ask how to spell a word find writing to be a real chore.

There are four different levels of sight words. Each level is given a letter designation from A to D. The A-level worksheets contain words that make use of only the white spellings for the sounds on the Decoding Chart. The B-level uses all of the spellings included on the chart. It also uses the double star codings for letters that are to be written twice. The C-level includes silent letters and their codings. The C-level also introduces outlaw words. Outlaw words are words that have such unusual spellings that they cannot be decoded

using the chart. For example, the sounds  can be written **won**,

using the blue spelling of  and the first spellings of the other two sounds.

The same sounds can also be written as **one**. But no combination of the spellings for the sounds on the Chart can be used to come up with a plausible explanation for this spelling. **One** is an outlaw word. Outlaw words are discussed more fully in the Appendix.



The D level combines all three of the previous levels, mixing words made up completely of first spellings with words using a variety of spellings and words containing silent letters.

The worksheets provide extensive repetitive practice. All the A, B, and C-level worksheets have twenty-five words on them. However, there are actually only five different words on each worksheet, each of which is repeated five times on the page. The children complete the worksheets by using their Decoding Charts to write in all the correct spellings for the sounds that make up each word. Since the children can write the spellings without bothering to read the words, they might become very good spellers of words they cannot read. To ensure the children read the words they are writing, a series of Test Strips accompanies the Worksheets.

Each time a child completes two new worksheets and the review worksheet that follows (for example, Worksheets A-1, A-2, and A 1-2), that child is tested on the words just learned. To take the test, the child selects the appropriate Test Strip and gives it to another student. Any student who can read two and three-sound words may be the tester, it does not need to be someone who is also at the transition level. The tester then reads the words one at a time to the child as the child writes the words on a piece of paper. When the test is complete, the child takes the written words to the teacher to be checked. A score of one-hundred percent means that child may begin the next set of worksheets. Anything less than one-hundred percent, even if the child misses only one word, means the child must repeat the worksheets just finished and try the Test Strip again on another day. To aid the teacher in checking the Test Strips, the words contained on each of the Sight Word Worksheet are listed in the Appendix.

Students who do not pass a test the first time learn quickly that there is more to completing the worksheets than simply filling in the spellings. They must also read what they are writing, so they will know what the words are for their test. By the time students reach the B-level of the worksheets, they have learned quite well to read what they are writing. The only additional instructions they need for this new and slightly more advanced level relate to how to use the numbers that appear under some of the sounds.

There are two new instructions the children need to be given at the B level. First, the numbers indicate how far down you count to see the spelling to use. Second, you start counting at the white spelling. Children can think the yellow spelling is number one because it's the first color they notice.

The Sight Word Worksheets are introduced at the transition level because they provide students with a great deal of practice with their Decoding Charts. This practice carries over to each child's work with the Transition Worksheets and Tiny Writing Cards. The Sight Word Worksheets also prepare

the way for the next level of the program. The large number of sight words taught to each child by the Worksheets and their accompanying Test Strips makes the creative writing that is to follow much easier, because so many of the words that will need to be written can be written speedily and easily.

Once the first few students have learned to use their Decoding Charts, the teacher begins introducing transition-level materials at the Picture Packet, Worksheet, and Book Stations. Once these introductions have been completed, the A-level Sight Word Worksheets are introduced.