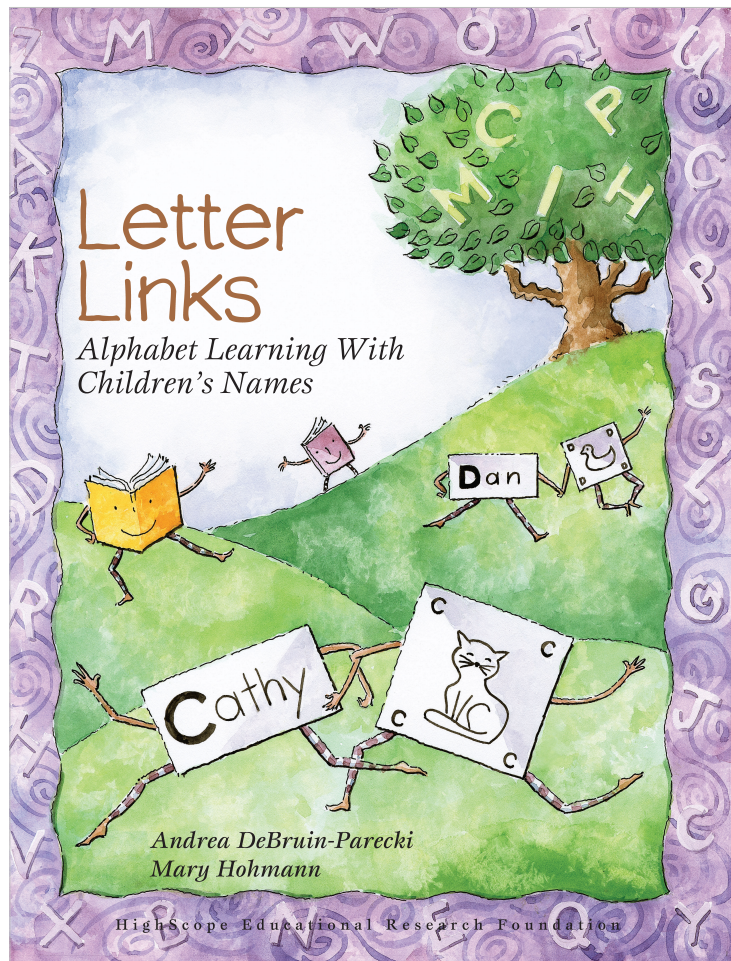


Letter Links: Alphabet Learning With Children's Names



Product code: P1204


What's in a child's name? A lot of literacy learning! A child's own name is an important personal entryway to early literacy development. That's why we have devised a **letter links name learning system** that pairs a child's printed nametag with a letter-linked picture of an object that starts with the same letter and sound.

Building on children's natural attachment to their own names, the letter links name learning system enables you to introduce children to alphabet letter names and sounds in personally meaningful and effective ways.

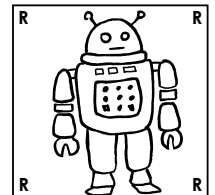
“Systematic teaching of the alphabet, one letter per week, is not as successful as teaching children letters that are meaningful to them” (Morrow, 1988, p. 131). Since children learn the alphabetic principle best when it relates to them personally, they need to work and play in environments rich with print and text, supported by knowledgeable teachers who engage them in reading and writing experiences closely related to their own lives, interests, and abilities. Clearly, learning to write and name letters is an interactive process involving both children and supportive adults.

Why Use Letter Links?

Young children learn alphabet letter names and sounds by talking about and attempting to write their own name and other printed words they encounter on a regular basis such as *Stop*, *Art Area*, and *I love you*. Pretty soon, they can identify themselves by the first letter of their own name, and soon after they can identify others the same way. They are able to differentiate between themselves and others using the written letter, for example, *A* stands for *Andee*, *D* stands for *David*, and *F* stands for *Flora*.

Children seem to move in a natural learning progression from name writing into letter knowledge. They begin by being unable to name a single letter and progress to learning that letters are unique and each has its own sound or sounds. While children use a variety of strategies to come to this conclusion, it is clear that learning to identify, read, and write their own name has a major influence on this progression. When such an obvious and accessible learning tool is readily available to teachers, it is imperative that they make use of it. *Letter Links* provides a means for doing so. We provide a child’s nametag in two pieces: The first piece displays the **child’s name** with the first letter highlighted—*Flora*; the second piece displays a letter-linked **picture** of an object that begins with the same letter and sound as the child’s name, in Flora’s case, a flower—. (See sample at right.) Children need to understand that letters have both names and sounds. The **letter links learning system** assists with this task by connecting the alphabetic principle with phonological awareness, two important skills young children need to develop as early literacy learners.

Most early childhood teachers provide their children with nametags or with symbols in distinctive shapes that bear the child’s name—for example, *Dan* printed on the shape of a truck, *Shantel* printed on the shape of bell, and so forth. So, why should they change from using nametags or symbols to using letter links? Nametags alone enable adults to identify children’s work and belongings and help children learn to recognize their printed name. With daily exposure, most young children will learn to recognize their own name. It will take them much longer, however, to learn to recognize the names of all their classmates and to use nametags to locate the work and belongings of others. Symbols with names written on them enable both adults and children to identify children’s work and



belongings quickly and easily. Even the youngest child soon learns that her symbol is the moon, Dan's is the truck, Shantel's is the bell, and so on. Children can also learn to write their own name from looking at and attempting to copy the name written on their symbol. Symbols also help children negotiate the classroom with ease because children can tell at a glance whose things belong to whom. Because the distinctively shaped symbols are so easy to read, however, they may in some cases overshadow the printed version of the name they bear.

Letter links, on the other hand, come in two distinct parts—the nametag and the letter-linked image. Separate but used together, these two pieces combine the distinctive print features of nametags with the easy identity of symbols and have the added literacy value of linking the two through common initial letters and sounds. Further, letter links support the child's developmental progression from symbols to print and from ideographs to letters and names. The letter links learning system provides two ways for a young child to recognize her own name and the names of classmates: *a written nametag*, which will gradually take on greater significance as she learns to distinguish its parts and write her own name conventionally; and her *letter-linked picture*, which she and other children can easily recognize and which will gradually fall into disuse because she will no longer need it. Initially, a young child appears to see her written name, *Flora*, as environmental print that stands for her in much the same way she sees the letters and pictures on the Cheerios box as standing for *Cheerios*, Nike and the Nike swoosh standing for *Nike*, the yellow and green John Deere logo standing for *John Deere*, and so forth. When we provide her with a written nametag—*Flora*—and a drawing of a flower—☼—she basically has two symbols or ideographs that stand for her. Over time, as she begins to distinguish the letters in her name, she will become more attached to *Flora* and less reliant on ☼, which will eventually become obsolete as she learns to read her own and her classmate's names. In the meantime, every child can read every other child's letter-linked picture before they have any understanding of printed names and letters.

The way the young child begins to write her name may be the best window we currently have on how she understands and begins to decode her written nametag. Her first "signatures" are scrawls and scribbles, generally one continuous form with no distinct parts or letters, indicating, for example, that she sees her written nametag as one continuous whole. Next, she begins to write her name as a series of patterns that include repeated elements such as lines, balls, squiggles, and even letter-like forms indicating that now she sees her written name as a series of parts or elements. After this stage, she begins to distinguish and reproduce actual letters in her name, beginning with the first letter and generally followed by the last letter, and these letters appear in her signature. Finally, she is able to write her entire first name, *Flora*, using conventional letters (though some may be reversed or upside down), indicating that now she sees her name as a particular sequence of distinct parts or letters. She may or may not know the names of the letters and likely does not associate the letters with the sounds they make in her name. This sound-letter connection will come later with more writing and reading experience.

Since the letter-linked picture also starts with and includes the first letter of her name, it may actually help the child to begin to see the initial letter in her written name. Moreover, since her name and her letter link also begin with the same sound, she may also connect the first sound in her name to the first letter or letter combination in her name.

Understanding the Letter-Sound Correspondences in Letter Links

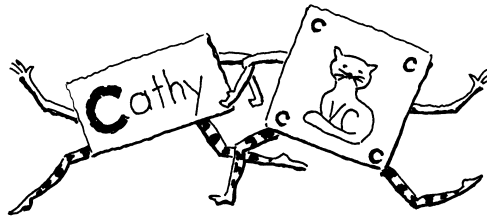
The idea behind the letter links learning system is to have each child in your class select a picture that starts with the same letter and sound as the child's name. Therefore, the letter links in this book are organized alphabetically by their beginning letters and sounds.

A look at the contents or a flip through the book quickly reveals that there are more than 26 types of letter links. Why are there more sets of letter links than there are letters in the alphabet? Because many letters represent more than one sound. Let's start with the vowels *A*, *E*, *I*, *O*, and *U*. Each vowel can be pronounced as a short vowel as at the beginning of *Andy*, *Evan*, *Iggy*, *Oscar*, and *Umberto*; or as a long vowel as at the beginning of *Ada*, *Eva*, *Irene*, *Okalani*, and *Ukiah*. Further, some initial vowels change their sound when they are followed by the letter *r* as in *Arthur*, *Ernest*, *Orrin*, and *Ursula*. Finally, some initial vowels, when followed by a second vowel, change sound yet again as in *Audrey*, *Eileen*, and *Eugene*. So, for example, depending on the influence of other letters immediately following it, the letter *E* can represent five different sounds at the beginning of five different names. Listen to the way the sound of the initial *E* changes as you say *Evan*, *Eva*, *Eileen*, *Ernest*, and *Eugene*!

When we listen to initial consonants, we find that two letters, *C* and *G*, have both hard and soft sounds as in *Caitlin* and *Cindy*, *Gabby* and *Georgia*. Then there are the digraphs *Ch*, *Ph*, *Sh*, *Th*, and *Wh* that represent a different set of sounds as in *Chelsea*, *Philip*, *Shemeka*, *Theo*, and *Whitney* as well as the *ch* that sounds like /sh/ as in *Cher*. The blends—*Bl*, *Br*, *Chr*, *Cl*, *Cr*, *Dr*, *Fl*, *Fr*, *Kr*, *Pl*, *Pr*, *Sc*, *Sk*, *Sl*, *Sn*, *Sp*, *St*, *Sw*, and *Tr*—are not new sounds. For example, the *F* at the beginning of *Fergus*, *Flora*, and *Frieda*, always sounds like /f/, but the *F* and the *l* at the beginning of *Flora* are blended so closely together in speech, that it made sense to us to provide letter-linked pictures that begin with blends for children whose names begin with blends. Hence, *Flora* and ☼.

Between long and short vowels, vowels influenced by *r* and by other vowels (*au*, *ei*, *eu*), hard and soft consonants, digraphs, and blends, we offer 67 initial sounds in children's names represented by 26 letters and letter combinations! Now you can see why the alphabetic code is difficult for young children to decipher!

While we have tried to provide letter-linked pictures that match the beginning letters and sounds of most children's names, some children in your class may have names that begin with sounds that do not correspond to the sound the initial letter represents in English. For example, in Spanish, the letter *J* is close in sound to /h/, so to English speakers, the name *José* sounds as if it were written *Hosé*. In



2

Getting Started With Letter Links

Now that you are familiar with the research behind letter links, the reasons for using them, and the letter-sound correspondences they entail, you are ready to begin using them! Here are the steps we suggest for introducing them to the children in your classroom or center.

Step 1: Learn Names

Learn the preferred name of each child in your class. For example, you may read the name *DeLawan Jamal Jordan* on a child's enrollment form and assume that this particular child is called DeLawan. His family, however, may call him DeLawan, Dela, Lawan, Wan, Jamal, Mal, DJ, Boomer, or Leon. If you prepare a nametag for him that says *DeLawan* and he refers to himself as Lawan, the whole notion of starting letter learning with the child's personal name is already lost. Asking a child who considers his name to be Lawan to choose a letter link that starts with *D* for *DeLawan* is totally confusing to the child. We know, because we've made this mistake ourselves!

Step 2: Learn Pronunciations

Learn how to pronounce each child's name in the way the child is used to hearing it spoken. Find out from family members how they pronounce the child's name and pronounce it that way yourself. *Cheri*, for example, might be pronounced to sound like *Sherry* or *Cherry*. You may pronounce *Eva* with a long *E*, while the child in your class and her family may pronounce it with a short *E* as in *Evan*. It is important not to change a child's name to suit the way you may be used to hearing it. If you see a child's written name and don't know how to pronounce it, ask a family member to say it for you. If you have trouble hearing or remembering how it is pronounced, write it out phonetically for yourself and practice saying it until you can pronounce it fluently.

Step 3: Make Multiple Nametags

Make several nametags for each teacher and child using the names children go by (that is, the names you gathered in step one). Print each child's name clearly. Capitalize the first letter and make it darker than the rest. If you need a guide, look at the sample nametags that appear in Chapter 4 in this book. (All the names and pictures may be duplicated.) If you decide to print nametags on the computer, choose a font or style of print similar to the one used in Chapter 4, that is, one that uses a **sans serif typeface**, such as *Century Gothic*. Print the first letter of the name in **boldface type**. You may wish to print some nametags on self-sticking labels.

Step 4: Child Selects a Letter-Linked Picture

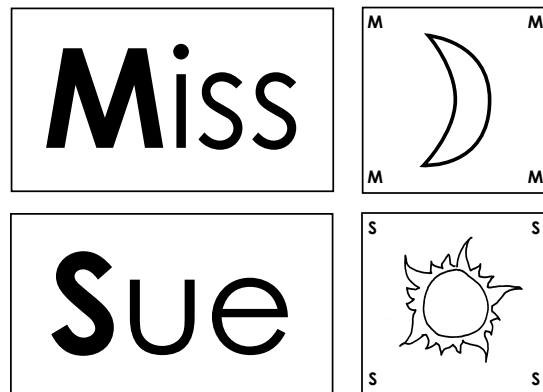
Have each child select a picture that starts with the same letter and sound as the first letter (or letter combination) in the child's name. To do this, find a time to sit for a few minutes with each child during the enrollment process, on a home visit, at arrival time, or during snack time. As you sit with Flora, for example, turn to the *Fl* page and ask her which picture she would like to choose to go with her nametag. She may select the flag, flamingo, flower, or flute. If another child in her class has already selected one of these images, tell her so. You may then wish to cover it up, replace it with your own drawing of one of the other choices at the bottom of the page, or simply read the additional choices to her. Once Flora has chosen her letter-linked image, pencil her name lightly next to it to help you keep track of the pictures children select.

Step 5: Teachers Select Letter Links

Repeat step 4 with the teachers and other adults (including parents) who regularly interact with the children in your classroom. Have each adult select an image that starts with the same letter and sound as the initial letter in the adult's first name. You or another adult in your classroom may have asked children to address you by title: Miss Sue, Mrs. Jones, Mr. Dan. In such cases, it is important to include only one word on your nametag so children can easily understand the letter link between the name on your nametag and your picture. Miss Sue, for example, may print *Sue* on her nametag and select an *S* link (saw, scissors, seal, sun), or she may print *Miss* on her nametag and select an *M* link (maraca, mitten, moon, motorcycle). Alternatively, she may print *Miss* on one nametag followed by an *M* picture, and print *Sue* on a second nametag followed by an *S* picture: "I have two nametags and pictures because I have two words in my name," she might say to children. "'Miss' and 'Sue'."

Step 6: Make Multiple Letter Links for Each Child

Either make your own letter-linked pictures or use this book to photocopy multiple copies of each child's letter link and then cut them out. To ensure durability, you may wish to



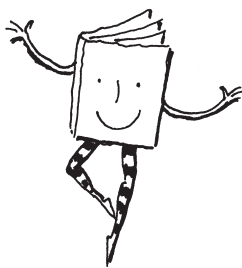
copy them on labels or on heavy paper or card stock, laminate them, or cover them with clear contact paper. You may wish to do this step with parents on a home visit or at a parent meeting to acquaint families with the letter-linked pictures and nametags so they can use them at home in the activities described in Chapter 3.

Step 7: Identify Each Child's Belongings With Nametags and Letter-Linked Pictures

Hang children's nametags and letter links around the room to designate things and places that belong to the child: a coat hook, cubby, personal storage tub, toothbrush (small version on adhesive tape); on the snack jobs chart, the jobs chart, and so on. Keep the nametags and letter links posted throughout the year so children will always know where to find their written name, and so that even young children and those new to the program can find their own and other's belongings by using the letter links learning system.

Step 8: Write the Child's Name and Draw the Letter-Linked Image on the Child's Work

Write the child's name and draw the appropriate letter link on the child's work as needed. Share this task with the child. When you draw a child's letter link, use the pictures in this book as a guide. Include telling details and do not worry when you simplify or modify the image based on your own drawing ability. A child named Cathy, for example, will recognize her "cat" drawing and yours just as she recognizes her own signature and your print version of her name.



3

Letter-Linked Learning Activities

Once each child has selected a letter-linked image that starts with the same letter and sound as the child's name, you can begin to use the nametags and letter links as teaching and learning tools! The following 25 learning activities will help you support and extend children's emerging understanding of the alphabetic principle, phonological awareness, sense of word, and vocabulary. The activities are numbered for easy reference and are meant to be used, revisited, and adapted to your particular children as needed over the course of a year. The activities can also be supplemented by the letter recognition, letter-sound, and phonological awareness activities described in *Fee, Fie, Phonemic Awareness—130 Prereading Activities for Preschoolers* by Mary Hohmann.¹

Activities Related to the Alphabetic Principle

Activities 1–16 actively engage children in recognizing their printed name, writing their name, identifying the letters in their name, and associating letter sounds with the letters in their name. By drawing their attention in a meaningful way to the letters and sounds in their own name, these activities will help children establish a firm foundation for deciphering the alphabetic code. Note that activities 2, 5–7, and 1–12 can be used by parents and family members at home either as is or with some modification.

Name recognition

- 1. Identify names and letter links.** Make a set of nametags and letter links in two or three sizes for each child and adult in your class. At a **transition time**, spread all the nametags and letter links face up on a table or the floor

¹To order this HighScope Press publication, go to www.highscope.org.

where children can easily see and reach them. Ask the children to choose their own name and letter link and take them to their small-group meeting place (or whatever event comes next in the daily routine).

At a **transition time**, provide a set of nametags and letter links in a box, bag, or spread out on a tray. Hold up a child's nametag and letter link and say "It's this person's turn to hop to the table for snack [or whatever is next]." Wait for one of the children to recognize and say the name of the child whose nametag and letter link you are holding.

At **large-group times**, use nametags and letter links from time to time to designate turns—to choose the next song to sing, to decide which game to play next, to add on to the story you are telling, and so forth. For example, hold up a child's nametag and letter link and say "It's this person's turn to decide the place in the room we should march to next."

- 2. Include names and letter-linked pictures on the message board.** Each day on the **message board** write a message that refers to one or more children by their name and letter link. Give children a chance to read the names and messages. Here, for example, are messages like the ones you might write:

"Flora ✿ ⇒ grandma's 🏠." (*Flora's at her grandma's house today.*)

"Stella ☆'s birthday 🎂." (*It's Stella's birthday.*)

"Aaron ➤ and Seth ⚡ Big box 📦 ⇒ house 🏠"
(*Aaron and Seth: There's a big box to use for your house.*)

- 3. Match nametags.** Make a set of nametag cards that will allow children to play a nametag memory transition game. Make sure that all the nametag cards are the same size. Include in the set two nametags for each child. Cover the nametag cards with clear contact paper for durability. At the end of **small-group, planning, recall, or morning greeting time**, spread all the nametag cards face down on the floor. Have each children take turns turning over a card, identifying the name, and leaving the card face up. When two cards turn up with the same name, have the named child hop (jump, skip, or crawl) to the next activity. Let the children know where the nametag cards will be stored (for example, in the toy area) in case they want to play with them during work or choice time.
- 4. Identify names.** At a **transition time**, place a set of nametags only (without the letter-linked pictures) in a basket or bag. Draw and hold up a child's nametag and say "It's this person's turn to jump to the planning table [or whatever event is next in your daily routine]." Wait for one of the children to recognize and say the name of the child whose nametag you are displaying. If no one can identify the name, hold up the letter-linked image that goes with it.

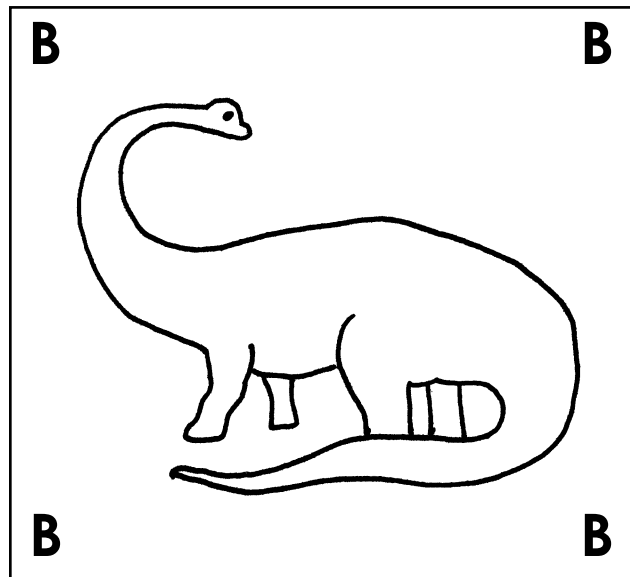
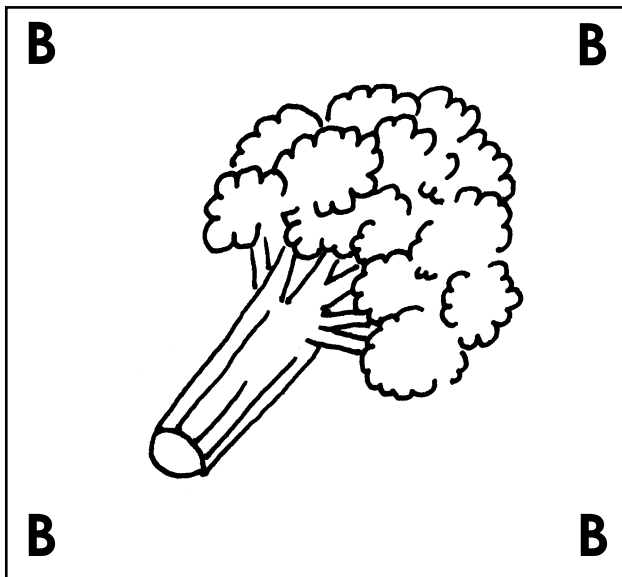
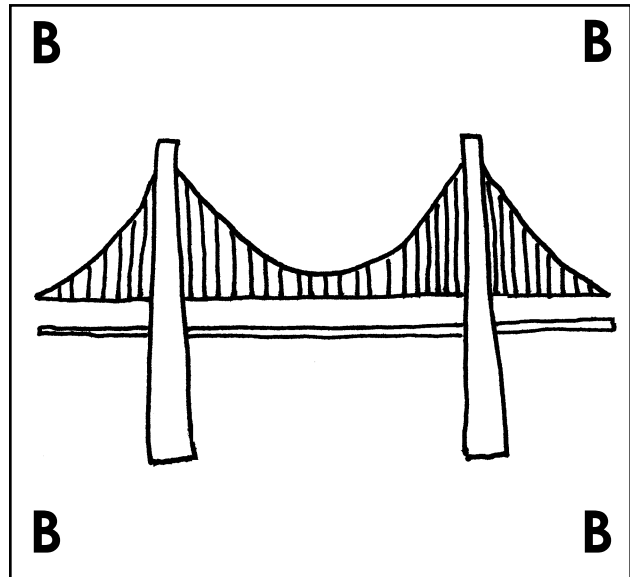
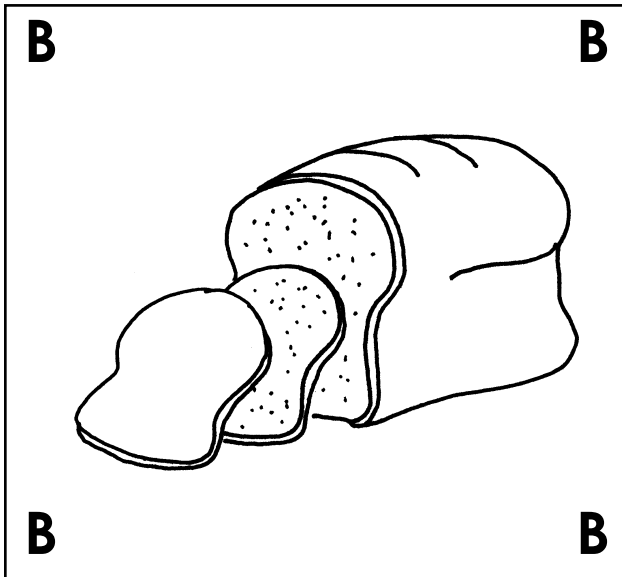
Sample nametag

B

Br

Brianna

Letter links for names that begin with **Br**



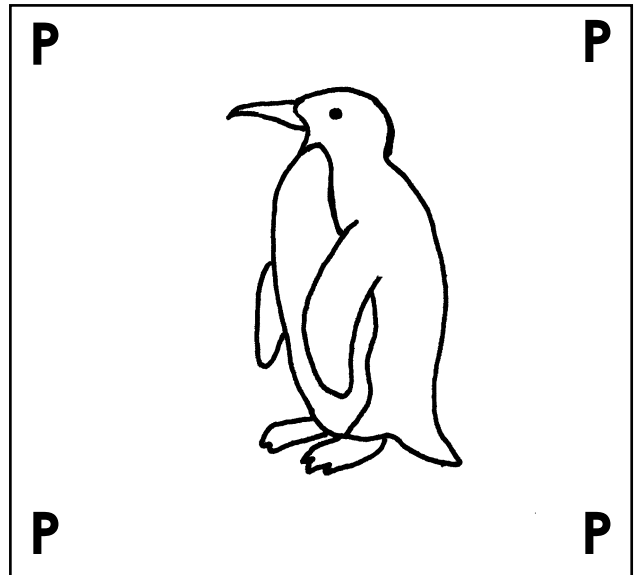
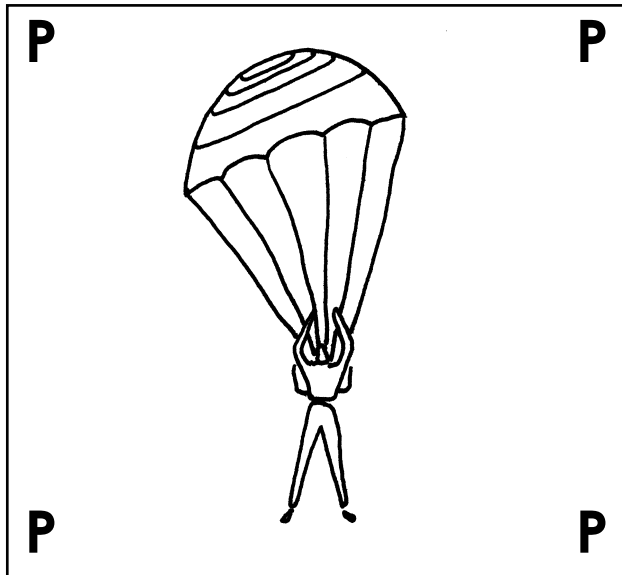
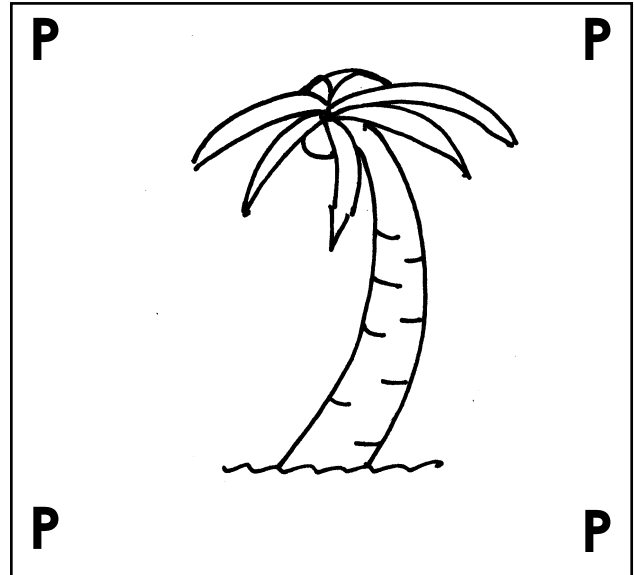
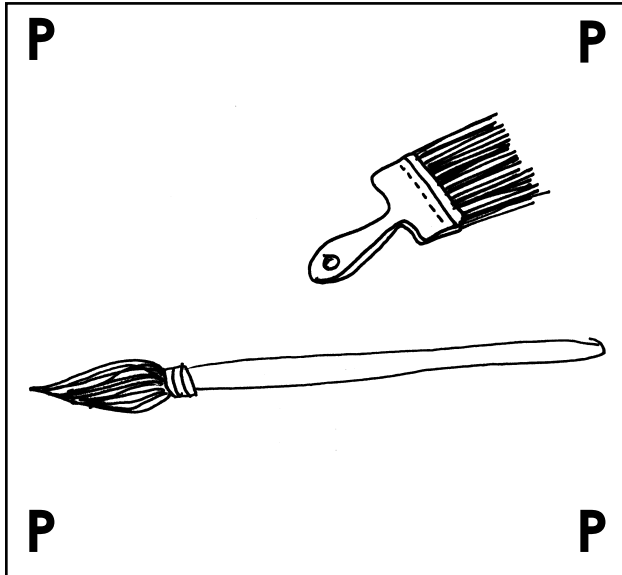
Bread, Bridge, Broccoli, Brontosaurus. **Other choices:** Bracelet, Braid, Bride, Bridle, Briefcase, Bronco, Broom.

Sample nametag

P

Pedro

Letter links for names that begin with P



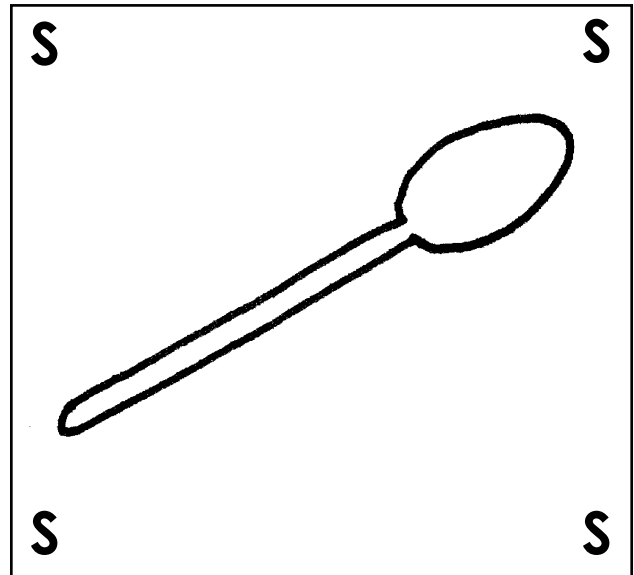
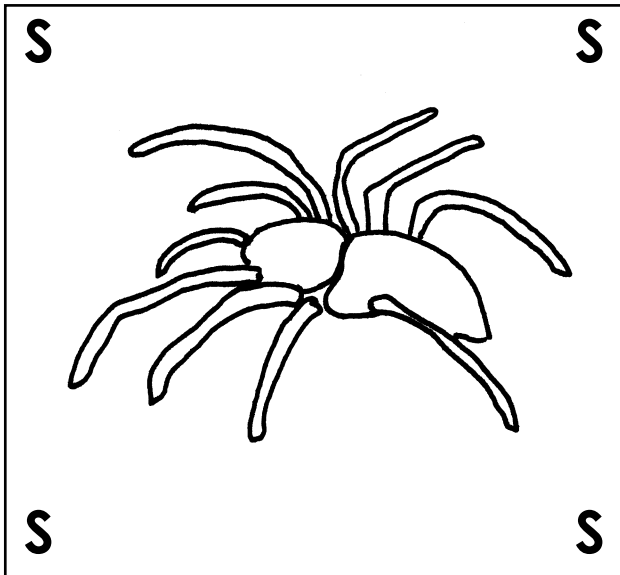
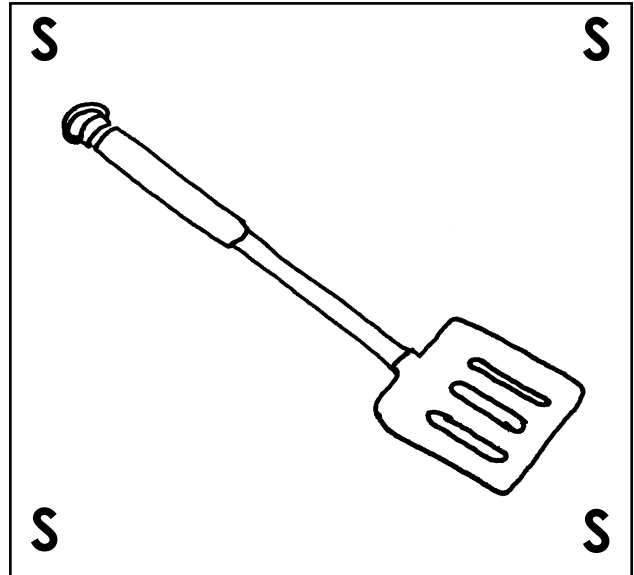
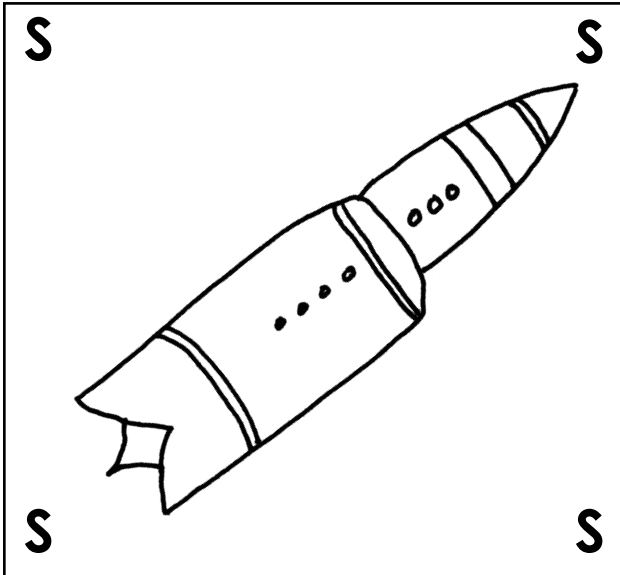
Paintbrush, Palm tree, Parachute, Penguin. **Other choices:** Pagoda, Pan, Panda, Pants, Parrot, Peacock, Peanut, Pea pod, Pelican, Pie, Pig, Pineapple, Pocket, Pogo stick.

Sample nametag

S
Sp

Spencer

Letter links for names that begin with Sp



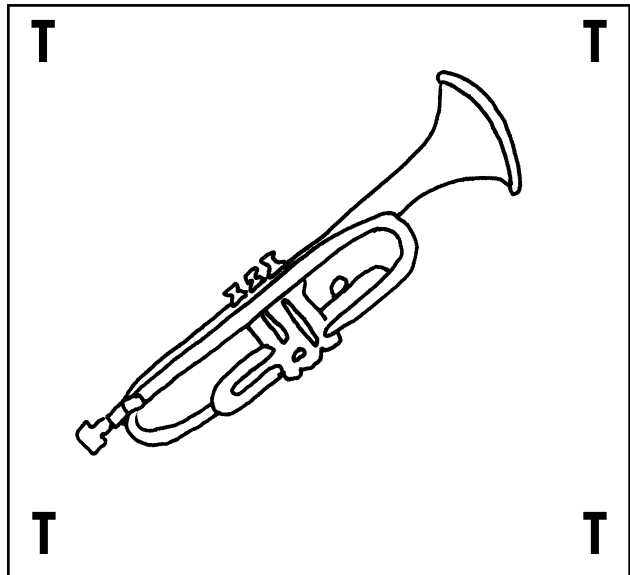
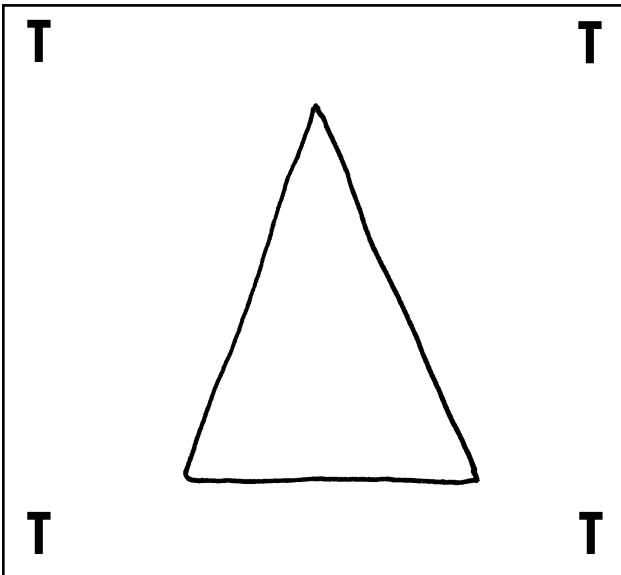
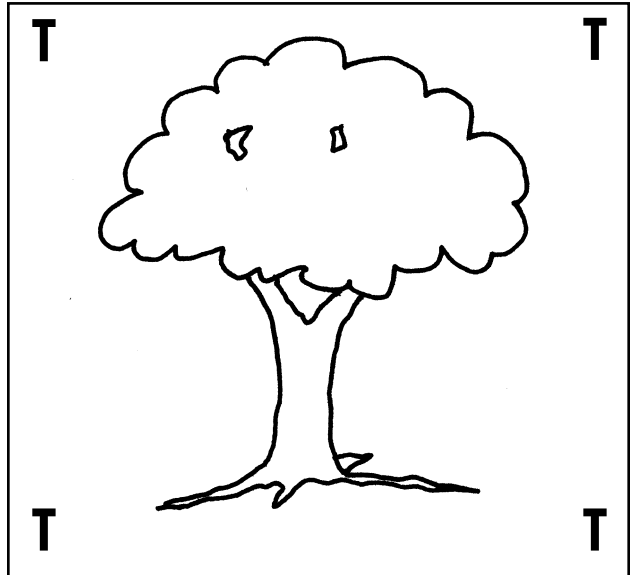
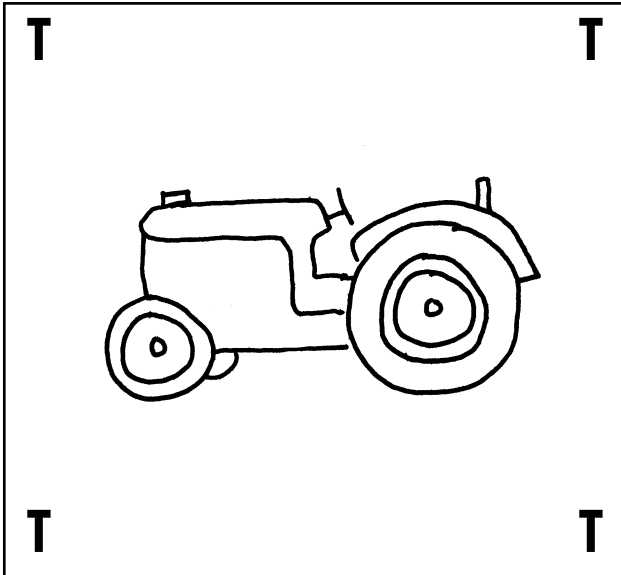
Spaceship, Spatula, Spider, Spoon. **Other choices:** Spindle, Spinning wheel, Sponge, Spool.

Sample nametag

T
Tr

Travis

Letter links for names that begin with Tr



Tractor, Tree, Triangle, Trumpet. **Other choices:** Train, Trampoline, Trapezoid, Travois, Triceratops, Tricycle, Truck, Trunk.