

*A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V  
W X Y Z*

## WILL MY CHILD LEARN LETTERS AND NUMBERS AT THE PLAYHOUSE?

My answer is yes but not in the traditional way you may think. Your child will not be required to sit in a small group at a certain time each day to work on that week's letter, number, color, or shape. At The Playhouse, we trust the natural process of the development of representational and mathematical skills. Most letter and number practice is integrated into the classroom curriculum, as the children visit the various learning centers. Letters and numbers, and all that goes along with their development, happen everyday, throughout the day, often without the children being aware that they're learning. Of course, we provide daily opportunities with letter, shape, counting, and number puzzles and games, but this is just the tip of the iceberg. Research has shown that reading aloud to preschoolers significantly influences the creation of a strong reader. Reading aloud to a child or small group occurs during our Open Classroom time, not just at Circle time, laying the foundation for a love of books and reading and writing. The children can also visit the "fine motor" table in the art area and use pencils, markers, and crayons, letter and number stencils, stickers, stamps, staplers, hole punchers, and rulers. Visiting this table and working with play dough strengthens those muscles needed for writing.

Let's follow four-year old Madison through a typical school day. Maddy arrives about 9:00 a.m. and matches her sweater and backpack to the hook that is labeled with her name. Later on in the year, her last name will be there to identify. She notices that three-year old Mike's pack is in her spot, and giggling quietly, she moves it to his correct hook. Before entering her classroom, she drops the Playhouse book she borrowed into the basket marked "BOOKS TO BORROW & RETURN". Next, she sorts through the

*0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18*

attendance bucket of names and places hers on the “ I came to school chart.” Now Madison is ready to work or should I say play. Her first stop is the house corner and dress-up. There are many opportunities to practice representational/symbolic skills in this area. The basic concept of reading is to understand that written symbols stand for letters that when combined, represent a specific word. In the house corner, Maddy uses one object to represent another, including herself. Today she plays the part of the older sister, Cinderella, so please do not call her Madison. A banana is a cell phone and she records messages and shopping lists on the pad, near the phone.

She practices 1:1 correspondence while hanging each piece of clothing on a corresponding hook and while setting a place at the table (1 plate, 1 cup, 1 fork) for all those invited to the party. Because the baby in the highchair only gets a bottle of milk, she’s not included in the count. She counts the children at the table to recheck her totals. Does she need more or less cups? Oh-oh! There’s no chair for her.

Maddy spies her friend Beth at the Brio train table. She joins her, connecting train cars to an engine. “I have 7 cars and you have 5,” she comments to Beth, “If you get 2 more, we’ll be the same.” “I want 100. I want to have the most,” Beth says. “I’m 4 and a half,” Maddy announces with a hint of superiority in her voice.

Madison moves onto the block area, which provides many opportunities to solve problems using numbers, counting, shapes, sets, and areas. Maddy plans to build a zoo with the unit blocks. I volunteer to make a ZOO sign and head to the art area for a marker, paper, and tape. She dumps out a hunk of blocks, searching for the longest rectangles. “I need the tallest ones so the lion can’t jump over and escape.” She counts what she finds and suggests I buy more at Toys’R’Us tomorrow. Mike approaches, putting a cow inside the structure. Maddy reminds Mike that cows live on farms, tossing the cow across the rug. Mike and I start to build a farm next to the zoo, and the three of us begin sorting zoo vs. farm animals out of their storage box and into their new homes. This is categorizing by one or more attributes. Presently, Maddy can figure out if there are more lions than cows, but the question, “Are there more farm animals than animals in the box?” puzzles her. Mike goes by the perceptual cue of what looks like more and answers with a firm “Yes.” Maddy’s not so sure. She will master this concept of comparing a subset to a larger set within a year or so.

Maddy spots Anne walking towards the reading corner with Jon holding the book, *Annie and The Mud Monster*. Although Maddy has listened to this story numerous times, she needs to hear it again. The three of them snuggle closely against the colorful pillows and Anne states the name of the book and its author. Maddy wants to know how many pages are in this story. They locate the last numbered page-23. Jon informs us that his mom is 36. “That’s bigger,” he says proudly. Anne states her age and begins reading. Intermittently, the children name letters they recognize from family names and correct their teacher if she doesn’t read the content word for word. Occasionally, Anne will read a sentence halfway, letting the children fill in the rest. This is called scaffolding. Marc approaches, asking Anne to read *The Power Rangers*. “I’m reading *The Mud Monster* right now. You can sit down with us and read your book.” “I don’t know how to read,” exclaims Marc. “You can get an idea of the story by looking at the pictures.

“I’ll read your book next, I promise.” Later during the week, you may find Madison curled up “reading” *The Mud Monster* from memory, to a three-year old, using the picture clues.

Madison leaves when Anne opens *The Power Rangers* book. “That’s for boys,” she says. Is Maddy sexist? Closed-minded? No- she strongly identifies herself as a girl and organizes her world into sets of “for boys” and “for girls.” It makes perfect sense at her developmental level to think about her world in this way. Maddy heads for the sensory table, filled with cornmeal this month. She finds a shovel and container and Marie asks how many scoops she’ll need to fill it. They work together, counting as they scoop. Maddy levels the top with her hand and tries to pick it up. “It’s light,” she says, “The rice was heavier.” “Let’s see if you can lift it with just one hand,” Marie asks. Madison notices Jenna clearing off the art table, a signal that snack time is approaching. Maddy announces, “I forgot to write in my journal.” She locates her journal from the 13 others with names and opens to a clean page. She asks Ida to read the last bad dream she dictated that was about a whale swallowing her father. Ida re- reads it just as Maddy told it, without correcting a word. Maddy says she had a good dream last night about unicorns and begins to share it. Her teacher prints it quickly but legibly (the lights have signaled snack), so that it can be re-read or continued at a later date. Ida reminds Madison that she has time to record one more sentence and then it’s snack time. “Will

you sit with me?” Maddy asks Ida. “Can I give out the plates?” Maddy begins counting the children surrounding the tables-16. Betsy reminds her that Brogan is still playing with the castle and asks if she remembered to count herself. Madison recounts and the total is 18. She matches 1 plate to each of the corresponding 18 chairs. She calls to Brogan to wash his hands and come to snack. The empty spot at the table bothers her sense of task completion. Anne serves the pretzels and the children begin finding and showing the letter and number shapes they discovered. “Hey, my sister’s name begins with an O,” says Caroline, biting off a piece to transform it into a C for Caroline. “C is for my name and my dad’s.” “ My dad’s name is Daddy,” says Brogan.

After a good half hour of outside play or inside music and movement, Maddy and her classmates go to the Meeting area for Circle time. Her teacher puts on a Raffi CD and almost everyone joins in singing *Down By The Bay*, with the children thinking and calling out words that complete the rhyme. Next, it’s time to play a letter discrimination game. The teacher hangs 2 letters on the felt board and then traces one of the letters on a child’s back. The child then guesses without peeking which letter he felt. Emma volunteers to be first and sits in the chair. Because Emma knows her letters quite well, Marie adds two more letters to the board to make the game more challenging. Group time ends with a story, which becomes more complex as the year progresses. Listening is a skill that develops over time, so some children need a lap to sit on or a gentle reminder that it’s time to turn on their listening ears. Comments and questions are welcome. We occasionally go off on some pretty wild tangents.

About 11:55, the moms and dads arrive to collect their children. Their parents might ask what they did in school or whom they played with. “Nothing and nobody” are the typical answers from tired preschoolers. But their teachers know the truth and we just smile.