***Letters to Live By* Activity and Discussion Guide**

**Overview:** The overall goal is to introduce children to important values and encourage questions, discussion and creative play as they learn the letters of the alphabet. It is important to respect children’s questions and the ideas that they share. The *Letters to Live By* stories are designed to be appropriate for children of all faith traditions.

**Preparation:** Please review the discussion guide/activity for each story in advance so you will have craft materials ready. You can prepare a set of stick-on labels with the alphabet verse for the day so each child can put the label on their artwork. The only unusual item recommended is a prism (just one) for the R story. This can be purchased inexpensively on line.

**The letter**: Younger children often enjoy singing the alphabet song to start each lesson. The letter for the day (upper case and lower case) should be displayed so that everyone can see it. Practice saying the letter and the sounds it makes and some words that start with the letter.

**The verse and story:** Read the verse, or sing it! Each of the alphabet verses can be sung to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. Then read the story.

**Discussion:** Invite the children to discuss the story. After addressing their spontaneous comments, use the discussion starter questions to meet the objectives of the lesson.

**Activity:** Suggestions for craft activities are included as well as songs and non-competitive games that illustrate the concepts for each story. It’s hard for small children to sit still for long, so the activity should give them a chance to move around and wiggle!

**Closing:** It’s fun to sing the verse again for each letter.

**Note:** This guide is designed to be adaptable, so check back now and then to see what has been added. Several songs are in the works!

**A. Alive, Alike**

Objectives: Share the wonder of being alive, develop respect for all living things.

Discussion:

* Do you have a doll, teddy bear or action figure that you pretend is alive?
* How are you alike? How are you different?
* Do you have a pet or a favorite animal? How are you alike? How are you different?
* How is a living plant alike or different from a pretend/plastic plant? (You could bring in an example of each one.)

Activities:

* Divide a paper in half and draw or paste pictures of alive things on one side and not alive things on the other.
* Divide a paper in half. Draw or paste a picture of a person on one side and an animal on the other. With an adult’s help, make a list of the things they have in common on one side (ears, feet, brain etc.) and on the other side things that are different (wings, tail etc.)
* Music: (tune *Molly Malone*): We gather together in rain or fair weather, for this is the place where we all like to go, We like one another like sister or brother, and aren’t we all glad we’re alive, alive-o! Alive, alive-o, alive, alive-o, and aren’t we all glad we’re alive, alive-o!

**B. Babies, Brothers, Books:**

Objectives: Develop a sense of self-worth and family togetherness. Encourage children to think of siblings as life-long friends. Appreciate multicultural families.

Discussion:

* What can you do now that you couldn’t do when you were a baby?
* How might you help care for a younger sibling?
* Does an older sibling help take care of you?
* Bernardo’s parents speak two languages. Does anyone in your family speak a second language?

Activities:

* Make a collage or picture of things that begin with the letter *B*.
* Breathe like a bear! When bears get ready to hibernate, they slow their bodies down so they can sleep through the wintertime. Breathe slowly in (through the nose) and hold it for a count of three, and then breathe slowly out, gently through the mouth. Repeat several times as you relax.
* Music: *Breathing Meditation* by Sarah Dan Jones <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=4LE6QGtr3T8&feature=emb_logo>

**C. Changes, Community, Caring:**

Objectives: Learn how to address concerns, cooperate, make positive changes, and care for others.

Discussion:

* Why did the store have an “adults only” sign?
* What did the children decide to do to change things?
* What should you do if you think something is wrong and needs to be changed?
* What can a family do to make a community better?
* How can we show others that we care?

Activities:

* Draw happy pictures or make collages and send/give them to someone in the community who needs cheering up.
* If the children agree on a particular concern, help them make posters to display or send.
* Draw pictures of a pleasant community where people care for each other.
* Music: *One More Step* by Joyce Poley. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBbNwN3CtqE>

**D. Deeds and Days**:

Objectives: Sharing family responsibilities and taking pride in our work.

Discussion:

* Deeds are jobs that we do to help others. How did David help his parents?
* What are some deeds that you do?
* What are some of the deeds that grownups do that help the family?
* Why did David and Donna save the snowman’s hat and his valentine heart?

Activities:

* Trace around our hands to make helping hands or do finger-paint hands.
* Draw pictures of people doing good deeds.
* Music: (tune: *Jack and Jill*) Helping hands, helping hands, good deeds I can do, Day by day, I can help, what can I do for you?

**E. Earth, Environment**:

Objectives: Awareness of the need for a healthy environment because the Earth is our home. Learning to work with others to solve problems.

Discussion:

* What made Eddie and his dad sick?
* How did Eddie’s parents and neighbors try to make things better?
* Why was Eddie happier on the farm? Why were his grandparents happier?
* What are some things that pollute our land, sea and air?

Activities:

* Make recycled posters by cutting and pasting things that could be recycled rather than thrown away.
* Music: (tune: *This Land is Your Land)* This is my planet, this is your planet, we must respect her, we must protect her, we’ll fight pollution, everywhere that we roam, Planet Earth is home sweet home.
* Music: *What Can We Do?* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lUnAX3nSOo>

**F. Friendship, Family, Fun:**

Objectives: Appreciating friendship, understanding how feelings can be hurt by unfriendly acts.

Discussion:

* The children in Flora’s school teased her and called her names. Has that ever happened to you?
* F also stands for feelings. What are some good words we can use to describe how we are feeling?
* What are some good ways to be friendly to someone who seems alone or unhappy?
* F also stands for fun. What does your family do for fun?

Activities:

* Draw big flowers, or cut them out of magazines or used gift wrap, all different colors and give them faces, all friends in the garden they share.
* Music: Good friends, good friends, We feel fine when we’re together, Let’s have fun and help one another, ‘Cause we’re good friends.

**G. Goodness, Gifts, Gratitude:**

Objectives: Develop a sense of self-worth, understand gratitude, appreciate the wonder of growing things.

Discussion:

* What does it mean to be a good person? How does it feel?
* What does it mean to be grateful? What are some ways to show that we are grateful for something?
* Gail’s family and friends have special talents we call gifts. What do you and the people in your family do well?
* *G* also stands for gardens and growing things. What good things grow in a garden?

Activities:

* Write a group poem that starts: “I’m grateful for…”
* Make a collage or picture of things that grow in a garden.
* Music: (tune: *You are my Sunshine*) I’m grateful for my friends and family, the lovely Earth, the sky above, I’m glad for goodness all around me, Because everyone needs love.

**H. Helping, Happiness, Holidays:**

Objectives: Develop respect for people with different traditions, develop appreciation for the helpers in everyday life.

Discussion:

* Harvey’s mother and Hanif’s mother both have jobs. How do they help each other?
* Do you have a sitter who watches you when your grownups go out?
* What are your favorite holidays and how do you celebrate them?
* In the picture, Hanif’s mother is wearing a hajib, a traditional head covering worn in public by some Muslim women. What are some other things that people wear as part of their culture or religion?
* We see super-heroes on TV, but what does it mean to be a hero in real life?

Activities:

* Make greeting cards and decorations for holidays.
* Music: Songs for different holidays,
* Music: *What Can One Little Person Do?* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UA-8YEhGUCg>

**I. Imagination, Ideas, Inventions:**

Objectives: Encourage creative thinking and cooperative problem solving.

Discussion:

* Let’s imagine that wild animals could talk! What would you like to ask a wild animal?
* Let’s imagine you could travel to a place far away. Where would you go and how would you get there?
* What would you like to invent? How would it work?
* Let’s pretend we were supposed to go to the beach today, but it is raining hard. Let’s share ideas (brainstorm) and imagine together what we would do instead.

Activities:

* Make imaginary creatures or inventions out of clay or other easy craft materials.

**J. Justice:**

Objectives: Understand the concept of taking turns, being fair and helping others enjoy an activity.

Discussion:

* What are your favorite games to play?
* Do you have fun even if you don’t win?
* How can we help everyone have a good time when we play games?
* What does it mean to be fair?
* What can we do when we think someone is being unfair or unkind?

Activities:

* Before the class, hide words that begin with the letter J. A clip art picture can be included for younger children. Suggestions: jelly, jaguar, jack-in-the-box, jack o’lantern, jelly beans, jingle bells, jungle, jeans, jello, jet. Tell the children they must spread out and help each other find the 10 J cards, and when they find all of them, everyone wins.
* Draw or cut out things that begin with J.
* Bring a very large box with a flip top and have the children decorate it together. The children take turns being a jack-in the box and jumping up with a silly face when the others sing the word “jump.” (Tune: *Pop goes the weasel*) J is for a jack-in-the-box, for jars filled up with jelly, For jobs we do and jokes that we tell, JUMP! Jack be silly!

**K. Kindness:**

Objectives: Understand kindness.

Discussion:

* Like the boy in the story, take turns putting on a crown and looking out a window (or at a picture of an outdoor scene, such as one from a calendar) and decide how you would be kind if you were king (or queen or president) of all you could see.
* How are others kind to you?
* How are you kind to other people and animals?

Activity:

* Fold a legal-sized paper like a fan, cut one end to make points, unfold it and color it. Then tape the ends together to make a crown. Or make it with a paper bag (lunch size).
* Create a group poem about how we can be kind.
* Music: *Be Kind Everyday* by The Wonder Kids <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sazIIKrJbL8>

**L. Love, Liking others, Laughter**

Objectives: Understand that getting people to like you is a two-way street, and that love is not exclusive or limited. Understand blended families or changes in family structure.

Discussion:

* How did Liz feel when she went to a new school in a new town?
* How did Liz feel about her daddy’s new wife?
* Have you had someone new become part of your family? How did you feel about it?
* What can you do to show people that you would like to be friends?

Activities:

* Imagine that you are connected by invisible strings of love to all the people and pets in your life. Draw pictures of the people you love, pets too.
* Music: *Magic Penny* by Malvina Reynolds <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IclFQj4l3F0>

**M. Miracles, Mystery, Me:**

Objectives: Discuss how life begins on a child’s developmental level. Appreciate our connection with other animals. Gain an appreciation for diversity.

Discussion:

* People are mammals. Mammals grow inside their mother’s bodies until they are big enough to be born. Mammals grow hair or fur on their bodies and make milk to feed their babies. What are some other mammals?
* What animals are not mammals? (birds, fish, insects, reptiles, etc.)
* How are people different from each other?
* What would it be like if all people were the same?

Activities:

* Cut and paste a collage of mammals.
* Cut and paste a collage of different people, all colors and sizes.

**N. Night, Nice:**

Objectives: Overcome fear of the dark, gain an appreciation of science and the beauty of the universe.

Discussion:

* How can you help someone who is afraid of the dark?
* To get a good night’s sleep, what do you need? (darkness, quiet, comfortable place)
* Was Noah nice to his little sister? How are people nice to you?
* Noah told Nicole that the Earth’s shadow sometimes covers part or all of the moon. What does that look like?

Activities:

* Set up a light and make shadow animals with our hands.
* Have someone trace each child’s shadow profile (just head and shoulders) on a large piece of paper. Then have the child color it in.
* Use white and pale-colored crayons, chalk or white paste on dark blue or black paper to make beautiful night time pictures.
* Music: Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. Here is the original poem with several verses: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43200/twinkle-twinkle-little-star>

**O. Others**:

Objectives: Understand the Golden Rule, treating others as you would like to be treated, also treating others as they would like to be treated, since we are all different. Appreciating diversity.

Discussion:

* How can we be welcoming and kind to others?
* What would it be like for you to move to a different country where the language, clothing and even the foods were different?
* What is the Golden Rule?
* Does the Golden Rule apply to animals too?

Activities:

* Paper doll circle. In advance, fold a paper like a fan and draw a half person so their body is on the fold. You should get 4 dolls from one sheet of paper. Younger children will need help drawing and cutting out the dolls. The children can color the paper dolls (front and back!) so they are all different. The hands of the children at the end can be taped to form a circle, a letter O, so they stand up.
* Music: (tune: *He’s got the whole world in his hands*) All the children, holding hands, different colors, holding hands, helping each other, holding hands, We’ve got the whole world, holding hands.
* Music: *From You I Receive* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-C1kY3Pxi0>

**P. Peace, Places to Play, Poems, Prayers**

Objectives: Explore the concept of peace and how we can achieve it as we play.

Discussion:

* What does peace mean?
* What did the children in the story learn to do when someone started fighting?
* What are good places to play in your neighborhood?
* Practice the breathing exercise as described in the story—and remind them to use it when they are scared or upset.

Activities:

* Make a collage of people or animals being peaceful.
* Bring a large, easy jigsaw puzzle to class (you can make one at home) and divide the pieces among the children so they can complete the puzzle together.
* Write a group poem about peace.
* Music: *Let there Be Peace on Earth*, *and let it begin with me*, and learn to sing the first line. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRFNg-Eyt_0>
* Music: *I’ve got peace like a river.* <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=i%27ve+got+peace+like+a+river&ru=%2fsearch%3fq%3di%2527ve%2bgot%2bpeace%2blike%2ba%2briver%26form%3dANSPH1%26refig%3d38fc71f939b24361852b8eb73b927538%26sp%3d1%26qs%3dAS%26pq%3di%2527ve%2bgot%2bpeace%26sk%3dPRES1%26sc%3d8-14%26cvid%3d38fc71f939b24361852b8eb73b927538&view=detail&mid=D91102F19D23B1487AF8D91102F19D23B1487AF8&&FORM=VDRVRV>

**Q. Questions, Quiet:**

Objectives: Understand doing something good that will last to help others, appreciate the value of asking questions and listening, appreciate and respect older people.

Discussion:

* Why did the man plant an apple tree?
* Why should you be quiet after you ask a question?
* If you don’t know the answer to a question, what should you do?
* What can people do to make the world better?

 Activities:

* Go outside to a quiet place (or go on an imaginary trip to a forest by a river.) Have everyone be quiet for one or two minutes and listen to the sounds around them. If you are inside, play an audio clip of nature sounds. Ask “What did you hear?”
* Show the children a picture of a quilt—a good Q word—and explain how the pieces, sometimes made by different people, are stitched together.
* Pretend their paper is a quilt divided into squares. Draw pictures in each square.
* Music: In the quiet, I can hear, shhh, I can hear, Hush, hush, hush, I can hear. In the quiet I can think, shhh, I can think, Hush, hush, hush, I can think. (Continue with I can sleep, I can dream).

**R. Rainbow:**

Objectives: Understand what makes a rainbow, discuss the rainbow as a symbol of diversity.

Discussion:

* What makes a rainbow?
* Where do we see rainbows? (sky, waterfall, sprinkler, etc.)
* Collect a group of crayons, just one for each color of the rainbow. Give each child one crayon. Using their one crayon, can they draw a rainbow on their paper? No, they need help from all the other children. To make a rainbow beautiful, we need everyone!
* Birds, fish, animals, flowers and people come in all different colors which makes the world beautiful like a rainbow..

Activities:

* Use a prism, sold as a tube or a ball, or taken from an old chandelier, and have the light shine through it to create rainbows. Look through it, and everything will have rainbow edges.
* Have the children draw rainbows, sunlight and rain (or a waterfall) or a scene with rainbow edges.
* Music: “Rainbow Principles” by Mindy Simmons https://vimeo.com/436566016/c579e19ab9
Note that she gives all 7 colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and lavender.

**S. Sunshine and Stars:**

Objectives: Appreciate the natural beauty of the Earth. Encourage wonder at the magnificence of the Universe. Appreciate international cooperation.

Discussion:

* Where are the stars and the moon in the daytime?
* When astronauts went to the moon, they took pictures of our Earth. (Show pictures.) Can you see the land, the clouds and the water?
* Perhaps someday astronauts will go to a planet much farther away. When they look in the sky, what will they see? What will the Earth look like from far, far away?
* When scientists discover new things, they share what they learn with people all over the world. What happens when people share their good ideas?

Activities:

* Have children use white or light pastel crayons on black paper to draw a starry sky or planets in outer space.
* Song: *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.* Here is the original poem with several verses: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43200/twinkle-twinkle-little-star>

**T. Truth**:

Objectives: Appreciate the value of telling the truth and discovering what is true. Discuss forgiveness.

Discussion:

* Why did Tommy say he has a big dog?
* Why was Ted angry at Tommy?
* When we think about doing something that we know is wrong, something inside us says “STOP—that’s wrong!” We call that our conscience.
* If you make a mistake or do something wrong, how can you make it right?

Activities:

* Like the children in the story, think of things to color or cut out that begin with the letter *T*.
* Play the game of telephone, where the teacher whispers a word that begins with the letter T, and each child whispers it to the next, and see what the last child in line heard.
* Repeat the pledge to truth.
* Music: The Honesty Song. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwRDtrMeq0I>

**U. Understanding:**

Objectives: Encourage empathy. Share the concept that we retain good memories of people and pets who are no longer in our lives.

Discussion:

* What did Ursula do when her mother looked sad?
* Did Ursula’s mother feel better after she talked about her uncle?
* Do you have good memories of a pet or a person that you don’t see anymore?
* What are some good ways we can comfort someone and be understanding?
* What was wrong with the two umbrellas in Uncle George’s funny story?

Activities:

* Give the children small copies of photos of famous inventors from long ago. Even though they died, we remember them because we still use their inventions today. Paste the picture of an inventor on a sheet of paper and draw or cut out pictures of what they contributed around it. Suggestions: Alexander Graham Bell (telephone) Mary Anderson (windshield wiper) Charles Babbage (computer) Garrett A. Morgan (traffic signal) Ruth Wakefield (chocolate chip cookie) George Crum (potato chip) John I. Bared (television)
* Draw brightly colored umbrellas on a rainy day.
* Music: *It’s raining, it’s pouring.*
* Music: *Comfort Me* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq6q-mBbBp4>

**V. Valentines**

Objectives: Understand different kinds of families, adopted, blended, etc. Understand symbols that have meaning for us.

Discussion:

* The boy in the story was adopted. What does that mean?
* Not all children live with two parents. What are some other kinds of families?
* Valentines are one way to tell people that we like them. What are some other ways?
* Valentines are shaped like a heart to symbolize love. Show pictures of other symbols and ask the children what they think of when they see them. Examples: flags, religious symbols, the peace sign, the rainbow, sports logos, advertising symbols.

Activities:

* Have magazine pictures and craft materials so the children can make valentines or other greeting cards to give to people they like. They may want to include other symbols.
* V also stands for voices. Play the animal voice game: Before class, make up two cards for each animal with the name of the animal (and its picture for pre-K children). Give each child one card, and tell them when you say “Go!” make the sound that animal makes until you find your partner, then sit together with your partner and talk about everything you know about that animal. When all the children are ready, have each pair speak in their animal’s voice so the others can guess it.

**W. Words, Wisdom and Worth**

Objectives: Create appreciation of kind and useful language. Build awareness of how people cope with disabilities.

Discussion:

* What are some friendly words we can use?
* People use words to tell others when we need help. Do you know your name and address? Do you know the names of your grownups?
* Besides speaking words, what are other ways we can “talk” to people? (writing letters, texting, sign language, singing, smiles or frowns, body language, emails).
* The children in the story had problems with their speech. Do you know people who find speaking, hearing, seeing or walking difficult? What do they do or use to help themselves overcome these things?

Activities:

* Babies cry when they are hurt, but as we grow older we learn to use words. This helps parents, caregivers, doctors and nurses know how to help us. We talk about the parts of our bodies when we play the Hokey Pokey song. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7sEtc326kM>
* Learn an easy phrase or song in American sign language. Here is “I’ve got peace like a river” in ASL. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQipZNJzsuw> For young children, just use the main signs, (peace, river, soul) without all the pronouns and adjectives.

**XYZ Things we don’t know**

Objectives: Understand the value of asking questions and learning new things. Gain appreciation of different ways of doing things that are not wrong or right, but just different.

Discussion:

* How was Grandpa’s church different from the one where Yolanda’s family usually went?
* If your family attends a place of worship, what do you enjoy about being there? Are there certain ceremonies that you like?
* What are some things that you don’t know how to do yet and would like to learn someday?

Activities:

* Draw pictures of a place where you feel peaceful and good.
* Draw a picture of a grownup who is a kind, good person. Talk about your picture.
* Game: Go in and out the Windows. Have the children form a circle, holding hands. Choose one child to be the “weaver.” The children in the circle lift their hands to form arches, and the weaver goes in and out of the circle. At the end of the song, the child taps a new child who becomes the next weaver, and the first child rejoins the circle. Song: “Go in and out the windows, go in and out the windows, go in and out the windows, as we have done before. Friends around the circle, friends around the circle, friends around the circle, the next weaver is you.”
* Music: *We Give Thanks* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc0hotvnE-g>

**THANK YOU** for reading and sharing *Letters to Live By*. We want to hear about your experiences! Please send your comments to **MargaretSuttonBooks@gmail.com.**

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