



Word Wonders Activity 16: Signs, Signs Everywhere

CHILDREN ARE LEARNING TO...

- Notice the presence of environmental print (text) in the world around them (18 to 48 months)
- Understand that environmental print has meaning (24 to 48 months)
- Recognize the meaning of environmental print on familiar signage (like stop signs) (36 to 48 months)

ACTIVITY SUMMARY:

In this activity, children will explore environmental print, specifically the presence of text on familiar signs found in most communities. They will have an opportunity to explore the meaning of this environmental print and discover how text on signs can be used to communicate information. Since recognizing/understanding environmental print does not require decoding skills, it is a good entry-level activity for very young children who are beginning to learn about the alphabet letters and not yet connecting a letter with its sound.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Book: *I Read Signs* by Tana Hoban, or another picture book focused on signs and environmental print such as *City Signs* by Zoran Milich

For Activity 1 (Engage):

- Time to locate and note where environmental print/signs can be found in the program and/or immediate community
- Camera or phone that can take photos
- Printer to print photo images

For Activity 2 (Expand):

Handout 1: Environmental Print Cards and Examples

- Tape or other way to affix signs to the floor or carpet
- Optional: Manila folders, glue/stapler (if you want to make images sturdier for reuse)
- Optional: Laminator

PREPARATION:

For Activity 1 (Engage):

- Prior to the activity, pre-select a number of signs (in your program or immediate community) for a "sign treasure hunt." As you identify signs you'd like to use, decide what walking route makes the most sense for the ages/abilities of the children in your classroom. Select 4 signs to discover for children aged 18 to 30 months and up to 8 signs for children aged 30 to 48 months. Signs you might want to consider inside/outside the program include:
 - entrance/exit signs

- push/pull signs
- restroom signs
- an emergency exit sign
- a fire hose or fire extinguisher sign
- a "stairs" or "elevator" sign
- signs with an arrow like "right turn only"
- a sign that says "Office" or "Welcome"
- a sign with the name of the center (outdoors)
- a parking/no parking sign (outdoors)
- a street sign or stop sign (outdoors)
- a crosswalk symbol (outdoors)
- If your program offers transportation, you can include the sign on the front or side that says "school bus."

For Activity 2 (Expand):

- Print the environmental print examples from **Handout 1**; *only the number of signs you have decided to use for this activity*. Cut out each card and if desired, tape, glue, or staple to index cards to make them sturdier. Keep the cards together until you begin the activity.
 - For 18 to 30 month olds, select 3 signs for this game. Make 4-5 copies of each image.
 - For 30 to 48 month olds, select up to 5 signs for this game. Make 4-5 copies of each image.
- Mix up the images and tape them to the floor in a random pattern. (In the game, children will jump/walk from sign to sign, so they need to be affixed to the floor.) If desired, you can laminate these images so you can reuse them in the future.

Activity Instructions

EXPLORE

Share the following book and extension activity with children as an opportunity to help them recognize and understand the meaning of environmental print (signs) in their community.

Book: *I Read Signs* by Tana Hoban (a very similar substitute is: *City Signs* by Zoran Milich)

- **Introduce the book and its key ideas.** Show children the cover of the book: What do they see? What do they think this book will be about? Prepare children that this book is different from others: There is no story! Each page has a picture of different signs that children might see in their community. Let the children know that, together, you will "read" the signs. *Signs are words and pictures hanging up in our community. Signs give us information and instructions, and sometimes help to keep us safe.*
- **Support alphabet learning.** On the "Come In, We're Open" sign, ask children if they can find an orange O on the sign (open your mouth and say "O" and outline the "O" of your mouth with your finger). The railroad crossing sign is in the shape of an X. Have children cross their arms to make an X. (Demonstrate.) On the "Sorry, We're Closed" sign, ask children if they can find the orange O.
- **Use pictures and text to support observation and reasoning.** As you move through the photos, read each sign. Explain what the sign's purpose is for children. Ask if they have seen a sign like that one

before in their community. You might even invite children to guess what the sign says before reading it! Some specific questions you might ask:

- Notice that the “walk” sign is white and the “don’t walk” sign is red. *Should we cross the street when it says, “don’t walk”?* Notice together that when a sign gives important safety information, sometimes the color red is used.
- On the “Do Not Enter/Exit Only” signs, can children find the sign that gives safety information (the red “do not enter” sign)? Explain that a “do not enter” sign usually means there are cars coming from the other direction and we can’t go in, or else we might bump into them.
- Pause at the “stop” sign and ask children if they know what this sign says.
- For the “pull” and “push” signs, have children do these movements with you.
- **Make the connection to children’s lives.** Ask children if they have ever noticed signs in their community. What kind? What do they know about signs?

ENGAGE – ACTIVITY 1

Explain the activity: *We are going on a sign treasure hunt today! Your job is to help me find signs inside our school. Let’s go! When you see a sign, raise your hand to let me know!*

Walk children to 4 (18 to 30 month olds) or 8 (30 to 48 month olds) signs you have pre-selected within the program or directly outside.

Show children the sign. **Ask** if they can guess what it might say. **Explain** its meaning.

Take a picture of the children in front of the sign.

Continue reading signs as you walk around the program. **Encourage** children to show you signs they see along the way. Pause and explain what those signs mean.

Afterward: Print the photos you took of children with the signs and turn them into a classroom “I Read Signs” book. Encourage children to take turns reading each page to you and explaining what these different signs mean. Alternatively, you can print out these images and post them at children’s height along a wall in the classroom, creating an invitation to review and reflect on environmental print in their community.

Summarize: *Today’s story was all about the signs we see in our community. Then we took a walk through our program, and we discovered a lot of signs all around us. Does anyone remember one of the signs we found? The words and pictures on signs give us helpful information. Now when you come to school, you can tell your grown-ups all about the signs you see!*

EXPAND – ACTIVITY 2

Introduce: *Let’s play a game using all of our new knowledge about reading signs. Does anyone see some signs in our classroom? (Wait to see if children notice the signs on the floor.) “Yes!” We have a bunch of signs here! We’re going to play a game called Silly Sign Steps!*

Review: *Let’s start by looking at the different signs on the floor and see if we know what they mean.*

- **For children 18 to 30 months old:** Review the 3 selected signs. For each sign, ask children: *What does this sign mean?* See if they remember if it is a sign mentioned in the book. At this age, they may not be able to respond in words but pause to give them an opportunity to point or comment.
- **For children 30 to 48 months old:** Review each of the 6 signs on the floor. Ask if children know/remember what the sign means. If not, define it for them. Ask children if they have seen any of these signs in their neighborhood.

Explain:

- *I have some cards in my hand. (Show children.)*
- *In this game, you are going to choose a card and look at the sign on the card.*
- *Then you will look at our silly signs here, all mixed up on the floor. In this game, you can only step on a sign that looks just like the one on your card.*
- *Let me show you. I'll pick a card.*
 - **Hold up the card** you selected.
 - **Name the sign:** *I chose [insert sign]. Hmm, this sign is [describe shape and color].*
 - **Find a match:** *Does anyone see a sign like this on the floor? Yes! That's right.*
 - **Take a step:** *It's a match for my card so I can step there!*

Give each child a turn to choose a card and take their steps over the signs. Support them by helping them notice/describe the color, shape, and meaning of the side. If children are able, they can hop or jump from sign to sign.

Continue playing to give children experience with a different sign card.

MAKING MATH CONNECTIONS

In this activity, there are many opportunities to use rich descriptive language to describe the signs. You can talk about their:

- Color
- Shape
- Letters or images

Helping children notice the *attributes*, or characteristics, of objects is an early math skill that supports their ability to sort and make sets.

You can also introduce *counting* by asking children to count how many signs are in each matching set.

REFLECT

Return to a gathering area with the children.

Say: *Today we learned that there are a lot of signs in our community that give us information we can use.*

Ask children:

For younger children, display several of the sign cards used today. *Which sign do you like the best? Show me! (Name this sign.)*

For older children: *Who can remember one of the signs we read today? What sign did you like the most? What will you tell your grown-ups about signs when you go home?*

SUMMARIZE: *Today, we learned that there is so much to read and learn in our community by looking at the signs all around us!*

INDIVIDUALIZING THE ACTIVITY

Make it more challenging:

- In Activity 1, you can obtain permission for a "walking field trip" in your community with children and select street signs to discover nearby. For example, you could include on the tour: street signs (street name signs, yield, right turn only signs, etc.), business signs (open/closed, welcome, words like *hair salon*, etc.), and community signs (recycle/trash signs, park/recreation signs, etc.).
- Extend Activity 1 by making two copies of each photo you take and use these pairs to play a "memory"-type game with children.

- In Activity 1, bring along clipboards, paper, and pencils so that children can draw pictures of the signs they see. This is an early writing experience as well.
- In Activity 2, you can use all of the sign images provided, rather than choosing just six.
- In Activity 2, consider using other types of environmental print (such as the logos of favorite toy brands or food products like Cheerios™ or Lego™) for this activity, instead of street signs.
- Offer a math extension in which you give children the task of sorting the sign cards into 3-5 piles.

Make it less challenging:

- In Activity 1, instead of exposing children to 3-4 signs in one walk around the program, consider introducing just one sign per day and reviewing the previous day's sign(s) as you walk to the new one.
- In Activity 2, feature just two signs likely to be familiar to children (such as "stop" and "walk"). Add signs to the game as children master the existing set.
- In Activity 2, be sure to select signs that look very different in color, shape, and/or size to help children differentiate.
- In Activity 2, like the suggestion above, consider using environmental print from children's preferred foods and toys (like the Cheerios™ or Lego™ logos) for the activity, keeping it to 2-3 examples at most.

MAKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE DAY:

- Keep the signs taped to the floor and offer the cards as a play option during free play.
- Point out and read the names of foods, stories, signs, or instructions you have posted in the classroom.
- Notice signage while on walks with children.
- Make signs with children for different parts of the classroom. For example, you might add a stop sign at the classroom door or a "restroom" sign for your in-class bathroom.
- Play "stop and go" with a two-sided sign. One child holds the sign. The other child can take steps forward when they see "go" and stop moving when their peer turns the sign to "stop."
- Have children make signs to add to the block area so they can use this environmental text in their constructions or train track building. If funding allows, consider adding toy signs.
- Add to your classroom "Signs" book over time, as your students notice new signs in the world around them.

Song: Signs

If desired, print and use pictures of the signs mentioned in the song – Stop sign, Don't Walk sign, Open sign – as visual cues.

Spoken: Hey friends! Let's walk to the ice cream shop today!
We'll pay attention to signs along the way so we get there safely!

Signs are here and signs are there. (Point here, there, everywhere)
There are signs most everywhere!
Let's go hunting for some signs (Walk in place)
Do it while the sun still shines!

Searching, searching everywhere (Put hand above eyes; look up/down/around)
Look! I think I see one there! (Point to the **Stop** sign)

Spoken: Let's take a look! This sign is red, it has eight sides, (Point to features of the **Stop** sign)
and the letters spell S-T-O-P – Stop! Hey – that's a stop
sign! Let's look both ways before crossing the road. (Model looking left/right/left)

Signs are here and signs are there. (Point here, there, everywhere)
There are signs most everywhere!
Let's go hunting for some signs (Walk in place)
Do it while the sun still shines!

Searching, searching everywhere (Put hand above eyes; look up/down/around)
Look! I think I see one there! (Point to the **Don't Walk** sign)

Spoken: Let's take a look! This sign is black with orange (Point to features of the **Don't Walk** sign)
letters that spell D-O-N-T (Don't) W-A-L-K (Walk) – Don't Walk!
We should wait to cross this road until the sign says "Walk!"

Signs are here and signs are there. (Point here, there, everywhere)
There are signs most everywhere!
Let's go hunting for some signs (Walk in place)
Do it while the sun still shines!

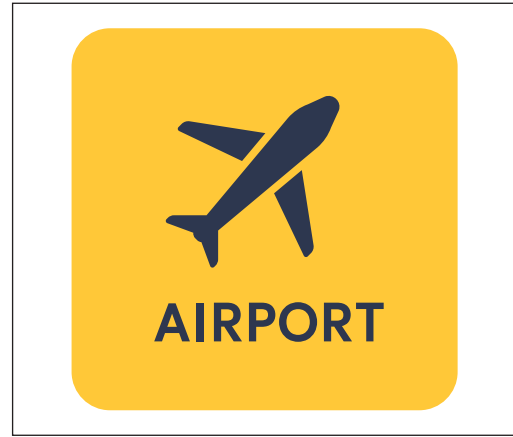
Searching, searching everywhere (Put hand above eyes; look up/down/around)
Look! I think I see one there! (Point to the **Open** sign)

Spoken: Let's take a look! This sign spells O-P-E-N (open). (Point to features of the **Open** sign)
Great! The ice cream shop is open – let's get an ice cream
cone with two scoops and sprinkles on top!

Signs are here and signs are there. (Point here, there, everywhere)
There are signs most everywhere!
As we went, we saw some signs and
Eating ice cream is so fine!

Handout 1: Environmental Print Cards and Examples









**DONT
WALK**











SPEED

LIMIT

20



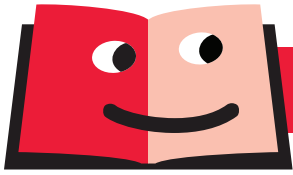
AIRPORT

**PLEASE
DON'T
LITTER**



**KEEP THIS
AREA CLEAN**





Just for Families

Words in the World

This week, children discovered that they can already recognize the meaning of some print in their community. We looked at signs and talked about the meaning of the words on signs.

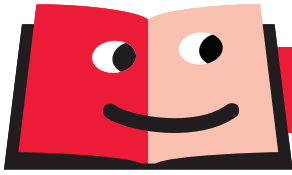
Even though children are not “reading” yet, they are learning that print has meaning. They are also learning that print on signs can give them important information. This understanding is an important building block for literacy skills later on! Here’s how you can help children build these skills at home:

Go for “sign walks.” While you are walking with your child, talk about the signs you see in your community: stop signs, street signs, speed limit signs, and more. Pause and look at the sign together and tell your child what it says and what it means. If you’d like, snap a photo of the sign so you and your child can look at the signs later on.



At stores or restaurants, notice the signs that are posted. Point out the different signs you see as you do your errands. There might be: open/closed signs, restroom signs, signs that say the name and price of items, and more. Ask your child to tell you if *they* see a sign. Stop and look at it together and talk about what it means.

When you help your child understand the meaning of the words they see in the world around them, you are sparking their love of literacy!



Solo para familias

Palabras del mundo que nos rodea

Esta semana, los niños descubrieron que ya pueden reconocer el significado de algunos materiales impresos que se encuentran en la comunidad. Miramos varias señales y anuncios y hablamos del significado de las palabras que están en ellos.

Aunque los niños todavía no saben “leer”, están aprendiendo que las letras impresas tienen significado. También están aprendiendo que las letras impresas en las señales y los anuncios pueden darles información importante. ¡Esta comprensión es un pilar fundamental para adquirir habilidades de lectoescritura más adelante! A continuación, le indicamos cómo puede ayudar a los niños a mejorar estas habilidades en casa:

Salga a dar “paseos en busca de señales y anuncios”. Mientras camina con su hijo, hablele sobre las señales que ven en la comunidad: señales de parada, letreros con nombres de las calles, señales de límite de velocidad y otras. Deténganse, miren juntos la señal o el anuncio y explíquelo a su hijo lo que dice y lo que significa. Si lo desea, tome una foto de la señal para que usted y su hijo puedan verla más tarde.



En las tiendas y los restaurantes, fíjense en los anuncios que hay. Observen los diferentes anuncios y señales que ven mientras hacen las compras. Es posible que haya anuncios de abierto/cerrado, anuncios que indican dónde quedan los baños, otros con el nombre y el precio de los artículos, y muchos más. Pídale a su hijo que le diga si ve un anuncio. Deténganse, obsérvenlo juntos y hablen sobre lo que significa.

Cuando usted ayuda a su hijo a comprender el significado de las palabras que ve en el mundo que le rodea, ¡está despertando su amor por la lectura y la escritura!