

ISLAND ALPHABET BOOKS

New Pacific Language Teaching Materials Feature Children's Art

By Lee Noto and Lori Phillips

A major problem facing teachers in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific is the lack of teaching materials in local languages. A new series of alphabet books aims to meet that need while showcasing the artwork of Pacific children. The Island Alphabet Books, published by Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) in partnership with Bess Press, are available in nine Pacific languages and English. Alphabet books, which show each letter of the alphabet along with a picture or illustration representing a word that begins with that letter, are an invaluable tool for teaching children the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds.

There is great value in learning the alphabet during the early years, as an important aspect of learning to read is recognizing letters. These books can be an integral part of a classroom environment rich with reading material, allowing children to explore the world of books and learn the letters of the alphabet. The structure of alphabet books, with a picture concept that is linked to each letter and sound, helps children form connections and leads to a better understanding of the connection between ideas and words. Children need continual practice in order to learn sound-symbol relationships, and alphabet books can become part of a repetitive experience that leads to automaticity.

Each of these books is illustrated with pictures painted by Pacific children ages 7-15. The images show the visual culture of the children's island world. Some of the images portray objects seen and used by children of the region in their everyday lives. Others show objects that might engage the teacher and child in a discussion or improve vocabulary. Because they were painted by children, these images were not meant to be realistic. Rather, they serve as a colorful window on the Pacific child's view of the world.

A major goal of the Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) is to improve literacy in the region through the development of culturally appropriate

reading materials. The Island Alphabet Books help fill a pressing need for teaching materials in Pacific languages and were a natural start for the REL's materials development project. In addition to being excellent learning tools for Pacific children, they also serve as a display of the

wonderful collection of student artwork that PREL has collected over the years.

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Photos: Caroline Yacoe

▷ Alphabet books are an invaluable tool for teaching children the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds.



▷ Culturally appropriate teaching materials in local languages help English language learners build solid reading skills in their first language.