Magnets in the Snow

Does your child wish it would snow so he can play with snowballs outside? While you are waiting for the real stuff, this activity lets your child play in pretend “snow” while practicing early reading skills and learning about magnets. And you don’t even have to put on your mittens and go out in the cold!

What You Need:

- Shallow plastic container
- White styrofoam packing chips (or "peanuts")
- Magnet
- Magnetic letters
- White index cards
- Cookie sheet

What to Do:

1. Select a word family, such as AT, AN, or EN. Based on which word family you selected, pick out the following magnetic letters:

   AT family: A, T, S, M, R, C, B, and P
   AN family: A, N, C, D, F, M, P, T, and V
   EN family: E, N, B, H, M, and T.

2. Cut the index cards in half. On each piece, write the letter for each magnetic letter that you selected.
3. Put the styrofoam chips in the shallow container. (If you have children under 3 years of age, be sure to keep the container out of their reach because the styrofoam can be a choking hazard.)
4. Show your child the magnet and demonstrate how the magnet picks up the magnetic letters, but not the index cards. Watch how the magnetic letters are pulled through the snow towards the magnet. Show your child how the magnetic letters also stick on the cookie sheet, but the index cards do not stick.
5. Hide the index cards and magnetic letters in the “snow”.
6. Give your child the magnet and tell him that it’s his turn to find all the magnetic letters. During the hunt, talk about how it is easier to find the magnets than the index cards because they are pulled towards the magnet. When your child finds a letter, have him place it on the cookie sheet.
7. Ask your child to find the base letters for the word family that you picked (AT, AN, or EN). Have your child pick up one of the other letters. Put it in front of the base word and sound out the word. Talk about how the two letters can be used to make lots of different words.

After you have finished the hunt, you can have your child hide some other magnetic items and nonmagnetic items in the snow. Play the game again with a new set of letters, and you'll be practicing core reading skills with a game you can play any day!

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