



Signs and Symbols

STOAmCnA+IOn



"Children, from birth, are witnesses to both the existence of print and the relationship between print and people"

(Hall, The Emergence of Literacy 1987)





Signs and symbols are all around us and research has shown that environmental print allows children to assign meaning to symbols and develop their early literacy skills. Environmental print might include advertising logos and shop signs, controls on household appliances, stickers and designs on clothing, graffiti and digital images.

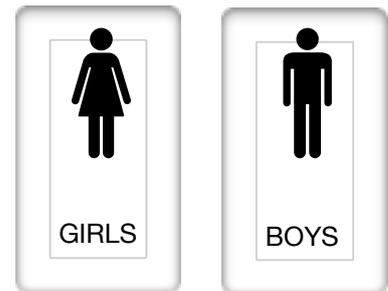
Within the Foundation Stage, we utilise signs and symbols to create visual timetables and to label areas, in order to support children to feel more confident in their choices and their ability to access information. We use them to enhance access to learning, reduce any barriers to learning and to support Speech and Language development.

With such a variety of signs and symbols we are able to create learning opportunities in a wide variety of ways and settings.

1. Helpful signs

From a very young age, children are able to recognise the importance of signs in order to navigate their world. Which way to go? Which door to choose? We are able to spark a discussion with children that highlights to them, how much knowledge they already have.

Often, signs require context to be 'read'. Children start to utilise a number of strategies to arrive at meaning.



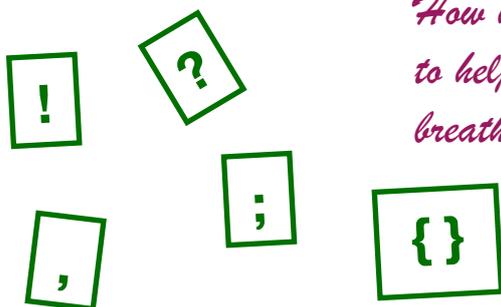
2. Signs in nature



We can derive clues and information from the natural world, if we know where to look and how to spot them. Spring flowers are a sign of new beginnings. A hidden footprint might tell us which animals live nearby.

3. Signs in writing

How hard it is to read a page without full stops to help us gauge where we can take a single breath it could just lead us to our death





4. Warning signs

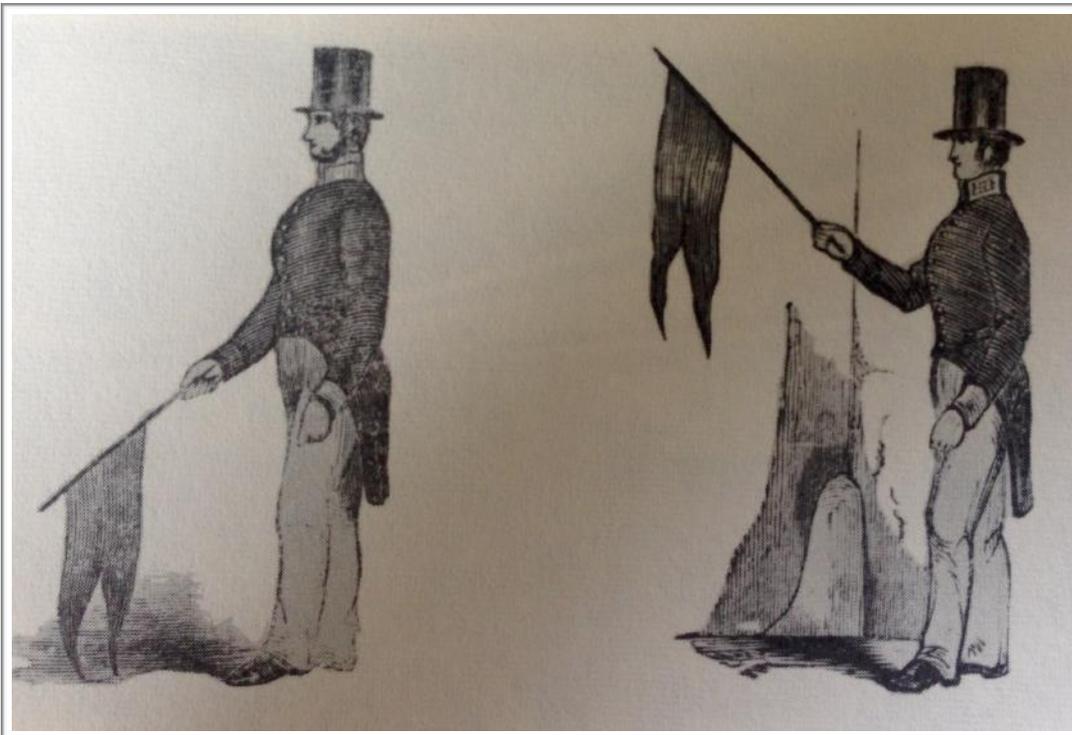


Signs and symbols are often displayed in order to keep us safe. Children are already familiar with many of these symbols from their home environment and we as teachers, can harness this knowledge and extend it. Safety signs cover the areas of road safety, fire safety, internet safety, safety around medicines and rail safety.

The Signal Master

The age of the steam train

With the introduction of the railways, came the need for increased safety. In the early nineteenth century, 'Railway Policemen' were employed to stand at intervals along the track, in order to regulate the system. Originally given flags, these early signalmen would wave



their flags in such a way as to indicate to train drivers as to whether or not it was safe for them to continue. Sand timers were used to ensure each train was spaced evenly on the track (1-3 miles apart).



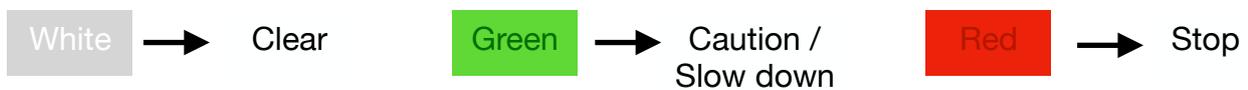


The previous image, depicts Railway Policemen holding flags that indicate caution slow -defective rail and caution slow. Any flag waved violently would signal danger, as would a red flag. Originally white, the flags very quickly became green and red.

This choice of colour was then continued as the signals changed to lamps.

Lamps

Flags were only useful in daylight hours and soon lamps were introduced in order to signal engine drivers, in times of little light or at night. Originally lit with candles, these were soon replaced by paraffin lamps that were lit by hand. Glass panels were coloured so as to show a white, green or red light.



Unfortunately the system was full of difficulties. If a signalman gave a 'clear' signal and then the train broke down halfway to the next signal, the driver had no means of alerting anyone.

As the speed of engines increased, it became more difficult to see hand signals and with the onset of electricity a new system of telegraphy was established.

Signals

The Electric Telegraph system improved safety by allowing signalmen to send messages to each other.



A system of oil lamps to signal to drivers might seem to us to be old fashioned but an article in the Telegraph Newspaper 20 Jan 2002 by Stephen Byers makes the following claims:

"The Telegraph has found that Victorian oil lamps - which have to be lit by hand and are frequently blow out in the wind - are still being used as trackside signals across Britain. Dozens of the lamps are still in service, even though the technology dates back to 1830 and Railtrack admits that maintaining them puts staff in danger."

Electric signalling systems like we see today were introduced which meant that signals could be controlled without the need for persons at regular intervals along the track.





Teaching Resources:

Signal Master

Introduction

By investigating signs and symbols, children are able to build on existing knowledge to deepen their understanding of the wider world. Through our module, children will take on the role of being a signal master by

-  Making their own signal flags using natural materials.
-  Investigating the effectiveness of signal lamps.
-  Making their own graphite signals to light an LED bulb.

The module initially makes links to signs and symbols that the children might already have come across and encourages them to consider why it is that we need many signs. We are able to then build on this knowledge to introduce new learning, linked to the railway.

In the classroom

Encourage the children to progress through the children's pack pointing out any signs and symbols that you might already be able to see around you. When going on your train ride, ask children to spot any important signs they see and why they think they are important.

Making signal flags

Follow the printed instructions to make your own flags using natural materials. When complete, we hope the children enjoy taking on the role of signal master to wave their flags and give the right signals.

Making graphite signals

Follow the printed instructions to make your own electric signal. Children use tape to attach an LED bulb to their printed image. They then use a graphite pencil to colour in the outline of the railway signal. This completes the circuit so as when they attach a battery the graphite conducts electricity to light the bulb.





Links to Early Years Foundation Stage Outcomes

Communication and language:

Speaking

- To be able to use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events.
- To develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events.

Literacy:

Reading

- Shows interest in illustrations and print in books and print in the environment.
- Recognises familiar words and signs such as own name and advertising logos.

Writing

- Uses some clearly identifiable letters to communicate meaning, representing some sounds correctly and in sequence.
- Writes own name and other things such as labels, captions.

Mathematics

- Uses familiar objects and common shapes to create and recreate patterns and build models.
- Uses everyday language related to time.

Physical Development

- Handles tools, objects, construction and malleable materials safely and with increasing control.

Understanding the World

- Talks about why things happen and how things work.

Health and self care

- Shows understanding of the need for safety when tackling new challenges, and considers and manages some risks.

Exploring and Using Media and Materials

- Manipulates materials to achieve a planned effect.
- Selects tools and techniques needed to shape, assemble and join materials they are using.

Technology

- Children recognise that a range of technology is used in places such as schools.
- They select and use technology for particular purposes.





Useful Stories featuring trains

The Little Engine that could - Watty Piper

Steam train, Dream Train - Sherri Duskey Rinker

The Train Ride - June Crebbin

The Goodnight train - June Sobel

The Little Train - Louis Lenski

References:

<http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk/docs/envprint-opps/environmental-print-in-early->

