

Connecting Handwriting and Drawing for Fluency: You've Got To Do The "O" Dance



The "O" Dance playfully teaches a circular, counterclockwise movement (starting on the diagonal) for efficient handwriting. It creates visual, kinesthetic and auditory memory hooks for the letter "O" (and a, c, d, g, q, f, s.) And so I say to my colleagues, **"Do the "O" dance!"** *First teach children the movement pattern. "Point to the door, ceiling, windows, and floor." Do this several times in a continuous motion. Practice it with eyes closed. Once the direction is internalized,*

*start moving while creating large "O's" to the music of **The "O" Dance** (Nellie Edge, ©2012).*

Activity: Children stand with straight right arm extended upward on a diagonal and index and middle finger pointed; making forward arm circles. If space is a challenge, the children can sit or kneel on the floor with dominant arm extended. (Left-handed children use both arms together.) The children can stand in place and make large counterclockwise circular movements rhythmically to music while singing, ♪ "Make an O, and an O, and an O, and an O, and dance around, and around, and around...". Guide their arm if necessary. Once you see children using the correct fluid movement, invite several at a time to move to the music while doing the "O" Dance with you - ♪ "and around and around and around..." This is great fun!

Musical accompaniment helps: Any waltz will do as background music (Straus waltzes work fine). We sing along with our daughter, Gina, using the old Woodie Guthry melody from the *Sing, Sign, Spell, and Read!* CD.

Dance children over to tables where 11"x17" sheets of paper are waiting for them. **Transfer this large muscle movement pattern to paper while the music continues to play.** Invite each child to create an "O" design page with crayons or markers making different colors and sizes of "O." Teacher and class volunteers **carefully monitor that each child is starting on the diagonal, angling up and around in a left moving arc to make a counterclockwise "O."** Make note on your abc handwriting assessment form of any child who needs additional practice. Repeat active whole arm movements and drawing activities until directional fluency is achieved. **Be very intentional with this instruction. Expect every child to master this basic directional handwriting skill early on and to evaluate their work. Did they 1) curve up, 2) form a left moving arc, and 3) close the circle.**



I asked Leah to underline her best "o" and verbalize why she chose it. I also verbalize my choice and criteria for a well-shaped "o."