Handwriting at Chesterfield

In Reception, we teach every child how to hold a pencil comfortably and to form letters correctly using the mnemonics from the RWI phonic lessons. This is the first stage of the handwriting programme.

Once children can write the letters, they are ready to join the RWI Letter Village. At Stage two, children form letters that will flow into a joined style.
In later stages we teach children how to join the letters and then build fluency. You can find the Letter Village videos on the Read Write Inc School portal.

4 stages of handwriting

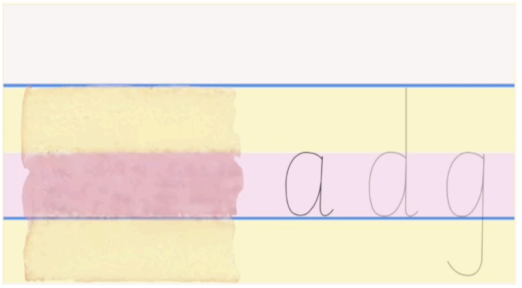
Stage 1: Reception (focus: letter formation)

- Daily Practice: Handwriting is taught daily for 10 minutes, focusing on correct letter formation.
- Resources: We use RWI mnemonics (Appendix 1) to support formation. Children start on plain paper and transition to wide lines once they are ready to learn size and relative position.
- Pedagogy: We use a four-step framework to structure each session:
    1. Visualise: Children build a mental picture of the letter formation before writing.
    2. Demonstrate: The teacher models the letter while speaking the mental checklist aloud, eventually having children call out the steps.
    3. Practice: The handwriting model is covered. Children write the letter repeatedly and chant the checklist aloud while the teacher circulates to spot common errors.
    4. Review: The teacher models a common error on the board. Children review their work for "two best bits and one to fix" before the teacher demonstrates the correct letter formation a final time.

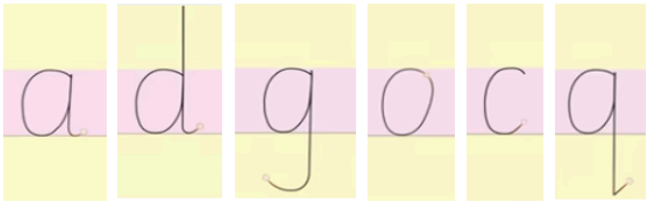
Stage 2: Year 1 and above (focus: relative size of letters and to form letters that will flow easily into a joined style)

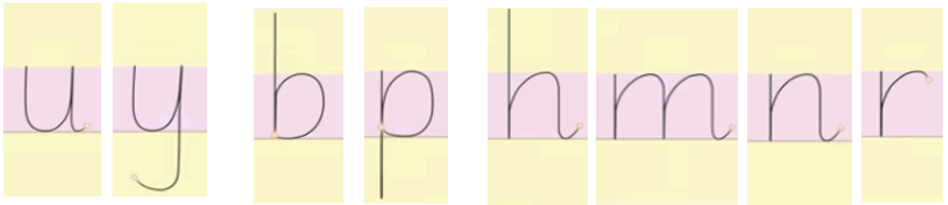
- Start using the Letter Village films when the children can write with correct letter formation.
- Daily Practice: Handwriting is taught daily for 10 minutes, focusing on the relative size of letters, and to form letters that will flow easily into a joined style.

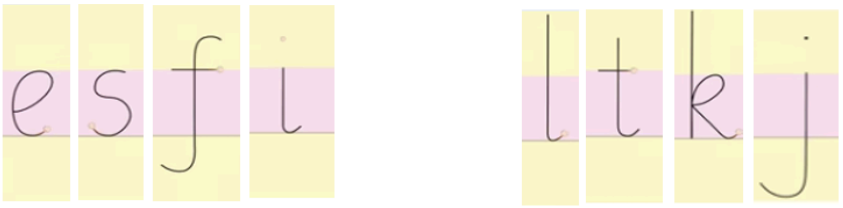
- We introduce ‘picture hooks’ to help children ‘visualise to memorise’ the shape of the letters. Do not ask children to copy. They will copy what they think they see – often starting in the wrong place and writing an approximation of the letter or join.
- We use an imaginary sponge cake so children can visualise where to place each letter on the line: jam in the middle, sponge on the top and bottom. Children watch the ‘How to use the sponge cake’ film on the Ruth Miskin Training School Portal. Remind children of the layers at the start of each lesson.

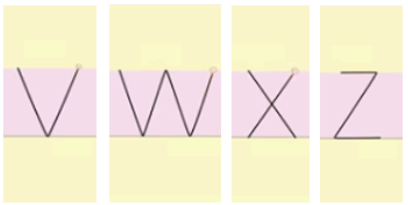


- At Stage 2, letters are grouped by similar formation:









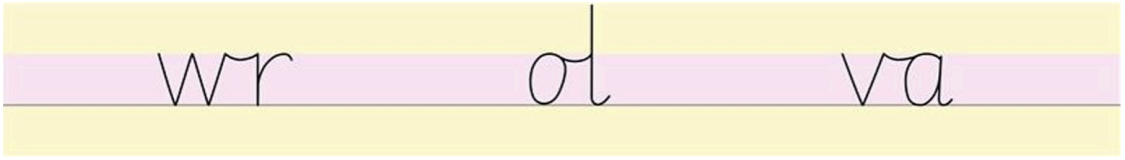
Stage 3: Year 2 and above (focus: learn how to join letters)

- In Year 2 and above, once ready, the children learn how to join letters using two basic joins: the 'hill' join and the 'bridge' join. Children practise each join with specific letter combinations. Then they write words with the joins they have practised.

Hill to jam letter **Hill to top sponge letter** **Hill to 'sister' letter**



Bridge to jam letter **Bridge to top sponge letter** **Bridge to 'sister' letter**



- We teach children that all letters are joined with the 'hill' or 'bridge' join with the exception of g, j, q, y and z:

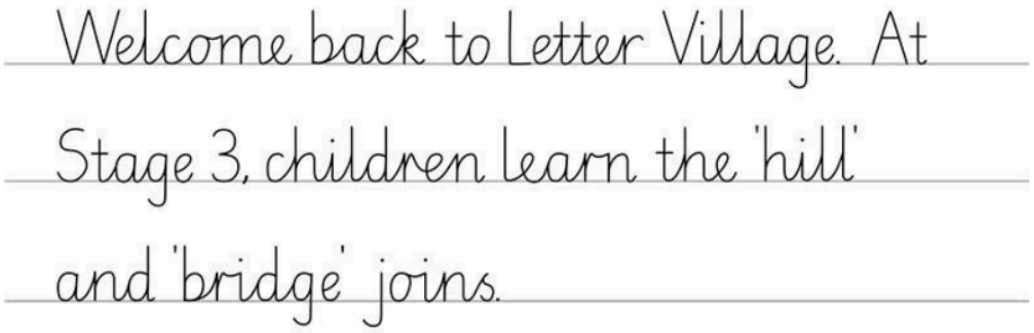


- We modify some letters to allow them to join. For example, r, e and s.



Stage 4: Year 2 and above (focus: help children develop a mature and speedy style)

- Before introducing stage 4 films, check children can form letters correctly and can use the 'hill' and 'bridge' joins.
- Children will learn a fully joined style that is legible, fluent, and consistent.
- In stage 4, children practise writing the 'hill' and 'bridge' joins, and build speed writing words and sentences.
- Children develop the automaticity needed to write with speed.
- Children will learn a style that looks like this:



Lesson structure

- All classes deliver a short, daily handwriting session (10-15 minutes).
- Photographic examples of correct joins and sponge cake placement should be displayed and modelled during lessons.

Stage 2 and 3 structure:

1. Introduce the letter or the join with a story and a rap (Letter Village video)
2. The teacher models how to write the letter or the join using the sponge cake format.
3. Children practise writing the letter/joins with immediate feedback.
4. Children check their letters/joins with their partner. Repeat steps 2, 3, 4.
5. Review the new letter/join and previous letters/join by asking children to practise writing words.

Stage 4 structure:

1. Practise writing a letter join
2. Check with their partner
3. Practise writing a word containing the letter join
4. Build speed writing the same word
5. Practise writing a sentence containing the word
6. Check their own sentence
7. Build speed writing the same sentence
8. Check with their partner

Handwriting habits are reinforced across the curriculum, with teachers consistently modelling fluent, joined writing.

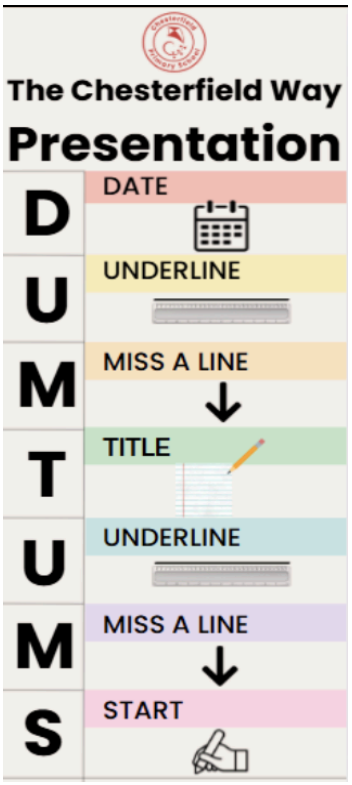
Handwriting position

Practise sitting in the perfect handwriting position. Once automatic, use the signal 'Ready to write' to trigger this position.

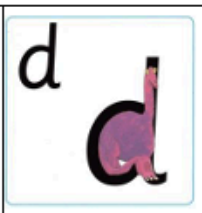
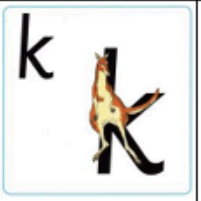
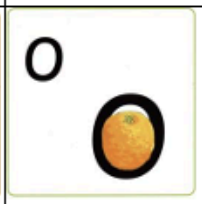
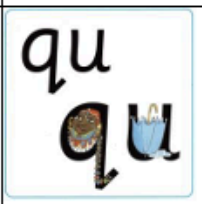
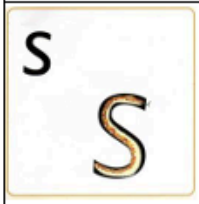
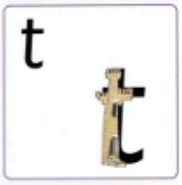
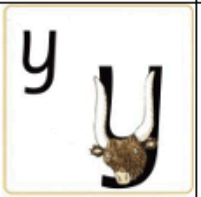
- Hand ready in a tripod grip
- Feet on the floor
- Bottom at the back of the chair
- Shoulders down and relaxed
- Lean forward slightly
- Left/right hand holds the page

Presentation Expectations

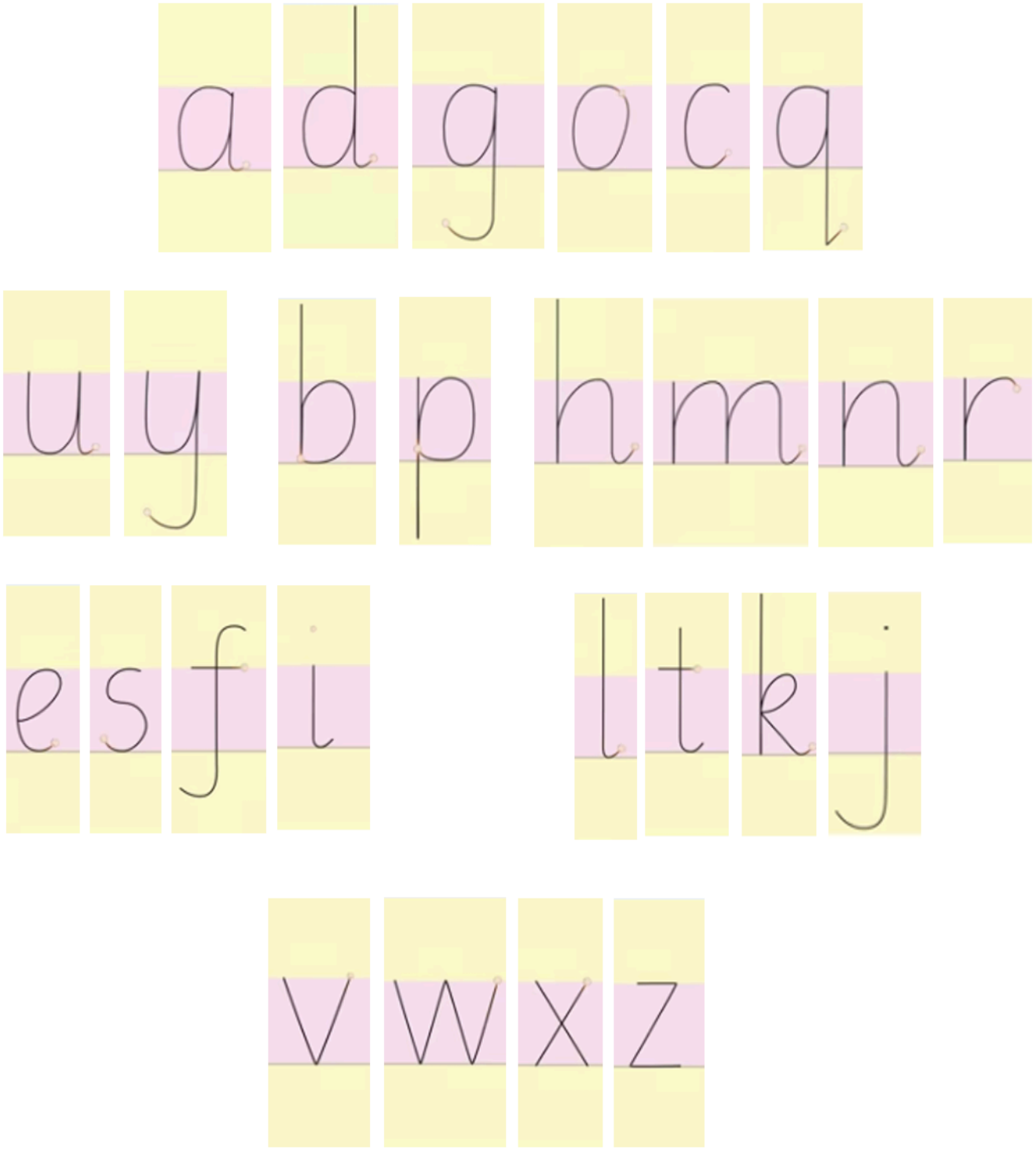
- Write the date and title neatly.
- Use correct spacing between words.
- Words should sit on the line with ascenders and descenders placed accurately.
- Rub out mistakes carefully or draw one neat line through the error.
- Use DUMTUMS



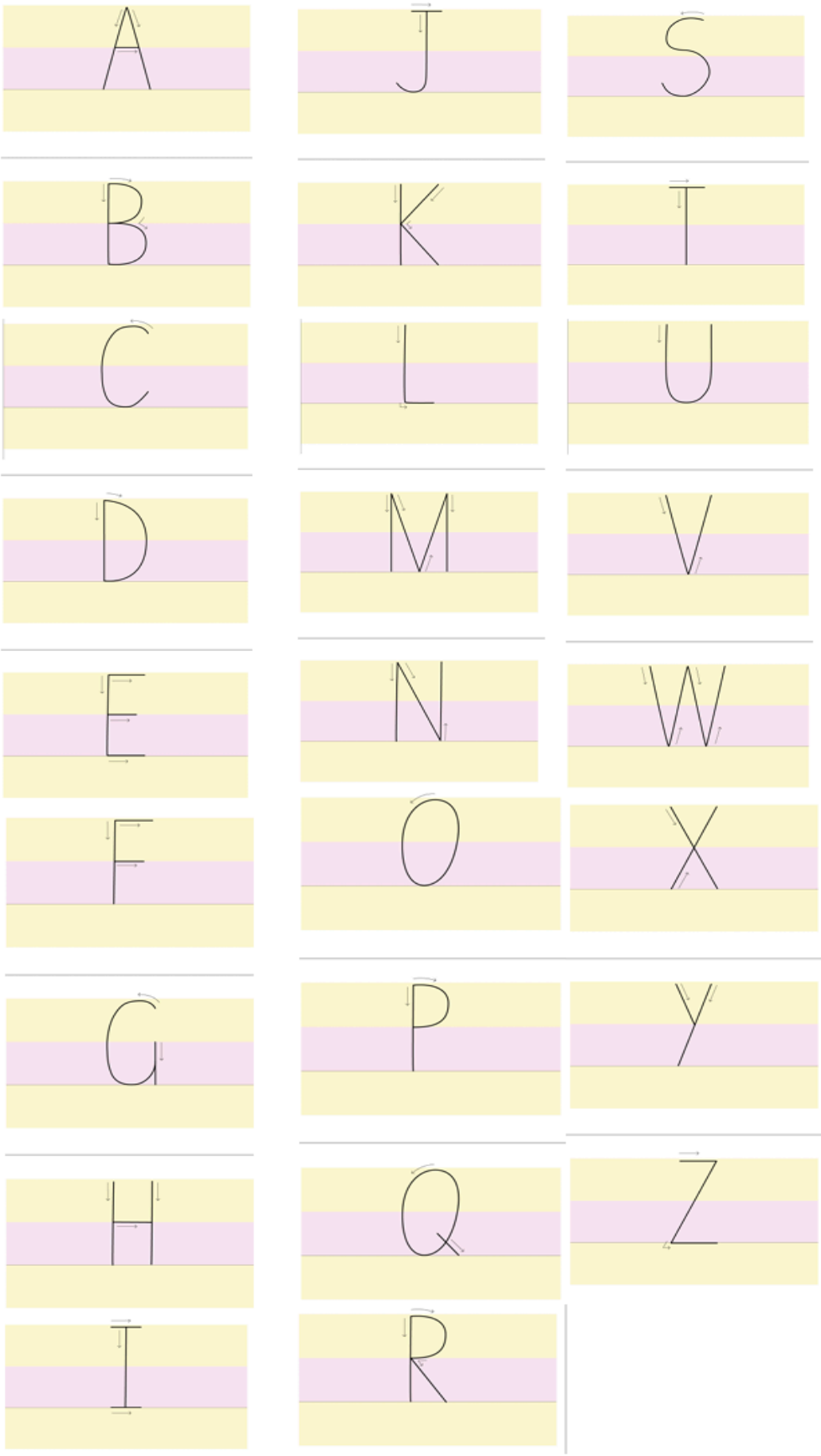
Appendix 1: RWI handwriting mnemonics

 Around the apple and down the leaf.	 Down the laces to the heel and around the toe.	 Curl around the caterpillar.	 Around the dinosaurs bottom, up his tall neck & down to his toes.	 Lift off the top and scoop out the egg.	 Down the stem and draw the leaves.
 Around the girls face, down her hair and give her a curl.	 Down the head, to his hooves and over his back.	 Down the body and dot for the head.	 Down his body, curl, dot for his head.	 Down the kangaroo's body tail and leg.	 Down the long leg.
 Down Maisie, mountain, mountain.	 Down Nobby and over his net.	 All around the orange.	 Down the pirates plait and around his face.	 Round her head, up past her earring, down her hair,and flick.	 Down the robots back and curl over his arm.
 Slither down the snake.	 Down the tower, across the tower.	 Down and under, up to the top and draw the puddle.	 Down a wing, up a wing.	 Down, up, down, up.	 Down the arm and leg, repeat the other side.
 Down a horn, up a horn and under head.	 Zig-zag-zig.				

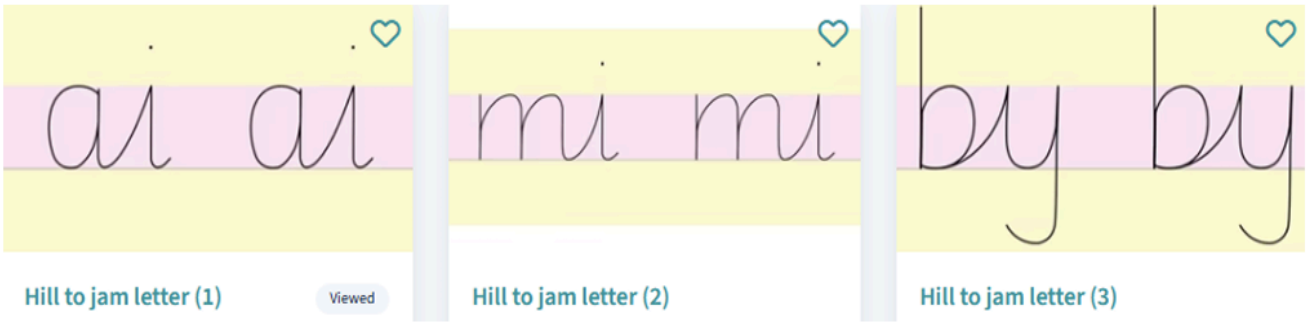
Appendix 2: Lower case families



Appendix 3: Capital letters



Appendix 4: Joins



Hill to jam letter (1) Viewed | Hill to jam letter (2) | Hill to jam letter (3)



Hill to jam letter (4) | Hill to top sponge letter (1) | Hill to top sponge letter (2) | Hill to top sponge letter (3)



Hill to top sponge letter (4) | Hill to 'sister' letter (1) | Hill to 'sister' letter (2) | Hill to 'sister' letter (3)



Hill to 'sister' letter (4) | Bridge to jam letter (1) | Bridge to jam letter (2) | Bridge to jam letter (3)



Bridge to jam letter (4) | Bridge to top sponge letter (1) | Bridge to top sponge letter (2) | Bridge to top sponge letter (3)



Bridge to top sponge letter (4) | Bridge to 'sister' letter (1) | Bridge to 'sister' letter (2) | Bridge to 'sister' letter (3)



Bridge to 'sister' letter (4) | Hill to egg (1) | Bridge to egg (2) | Celebration Day (egg) (3)



Joining to the snake (1) | Joining from the snake (2) | Celebration Day (snake) (3)