



LANGUAGE AND LITERACY



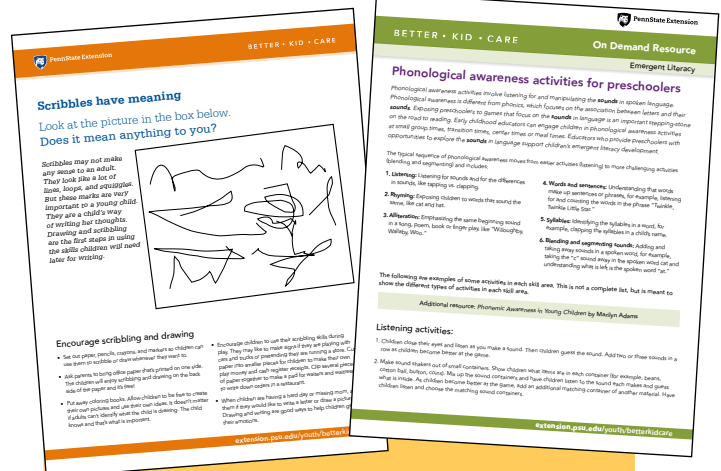
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Activities to support your child's engagement, learning, and development

These language and literacy ideas can be adapted for one-on-one use, or for small groups.

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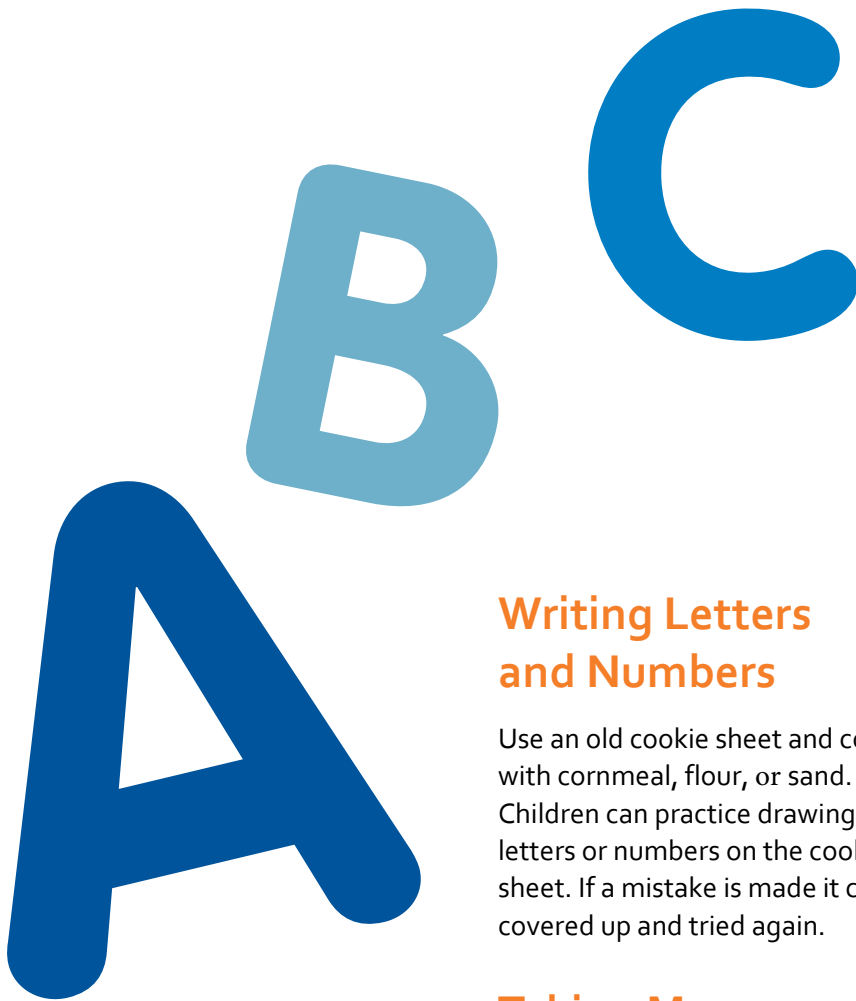
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HO_ExploreEngage_Language



Digging for Letters

Bury some plastic letters in a bin of sand, flour, or rice. Children can dig for the letters. Have them name each one and the sound it makes when they find a letter.

Writing Letters and Numbers

Use an old cookie sheet and cover it with cornmeal, flour, or sand. Children can practice drawing letters or numbers on the cookie sheet. If a mistake is made it can be covered up and tried again.

Taking Measure

Give the children pieces of yarn or string of various lengths to measure things around the room. Label each one, then line them up from the shortest to longest to compare the sizes of things.

The children can also measure each other to see how tall they are. They can even measure their hands, feet, or fingers and compare sizes.

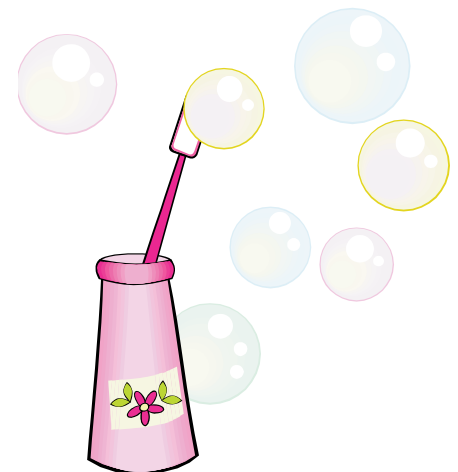
Bubbling Over

Children love to blow bubbles. Try some creative ideas for bubble-making tools such as twisted pipe cleaners, slotted spoons, plastic berry baskets, old tennis or badminton rackets, or anything else you can think of.

Have the children pop bubbles in different ways such as with their nose, or with one finger, or with an elbow, or even with their head. A silly time can be had by all.

Easy to make bubble solution:

1 gallon cold water mixed with one to two cups of dish soap. (Dawn or Joy work best) Mix and store in an airtight container.



Catch Some Fun and Throw Things!

Make your own catching mitts for the children from plastic milk jugs with the bottoms cut off. Tape edges for safety.

Children can use soft foam balls to practice throwing and catching or make their own by crumpling up old newspapers.

Use old laundry baskets for the children to throw the balls or bean bags.

Draw large shapes on the sidewalk with sidewalk chalk. These can be squares, circles, or triangles. The children can toss beanbags into the shape.

Tape a large circle shape to the side of a building and have the children "aim" for the target. Place a cardboard box or laundry basket under the target and see if the ball or beanbag falls in.

Puppet Fun

Photo Puppets

Take full-length photos of the children. Cut these out and cover with clear self-stick paper to make them stronger. Glue a popsicle stick to the back of each. The children can use these over and over to tell stories about themselves and their friends. This is a great way for children to practice thinking, observation, and language skills.

Easy to Make Puppet Stages

A large cardboard box with a hole cut in the side makes a great stage.

Place a blanket or sheet over a card table.

Tack a tablecloth or sheet part way up across a doorway.

Drape a sheet or cloth over two chairs.



Choking Cautions

Young children can choke on small objects and toy parts. All items used for children under three years of age and any children who put toys in their mouths should be at least 1¼ inch in diameter and between 1 inch and 2¼ inches in length. Oval balls and toys should be at least 1¼ inch in diameter. Toys should meet federal small parts standards. Any toys or games labeled as unsuitable for children under three should not be used.

Other items that pose a safety risk and should not be accessible to children under three include, but are not limited to: button batteries, magnets, plastic bags, styrofoam objects, coins, balloons, latex gloves, and glitter.

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Supported by funds from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, a joint office of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare.

Animals from *The Big Red Barn*

As an active dramatic play activity read a favorite children's story, then have the children pretend to be characters from that story. For example, read *The Big Red Barn* by Margaret Wise Brown to the children. This story is full of all kinds of farm animals. Ask the children to pick a favorite animal, then read the story again slowly, stopping on each page to allow the children to act out the part of their favorite animal on that page. Make sure each child has a turn during the story.

Here are some ideas to expand this activity:

- Help the children find more information, pictures, etc. about the animals in the story.
- Children can share what they learn about their animal.
- Make clay or play dough figures of the animals.
- Play a circle game where the children pretend to be their animal when it is their turn.
- Encourage the children to make up their own story about farm animals. Write the story down.
- Have them draw pictures of their animals to illustrate the story.
- Put their book in a place where all, including parents, can enjoy what the children have accomplished!



Build and Create with Shapes

Young children need to build fine motor skills, meaning control of the small muscles in their hands. In this creative activity they will also practice recognizing shapes and will use creative skills.

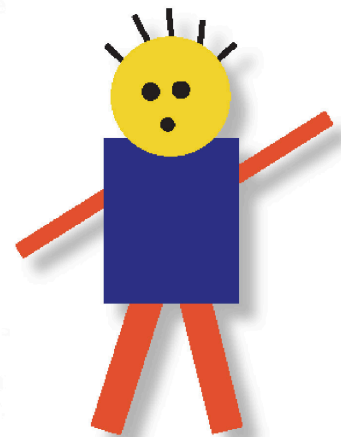
What you need:

- Thin cardboard or oak tag paper (or stencils of squares, triangles, circles, and rectangles of various sizes)
- Pencils
- Colored paper in a variety of colors
- Safety scissors
- White craft glue
- White construction paper

What to do:

- Make stencils of the geometric shapes in a variety of sizes out of cardboard or oak tag.
- Have the children trace the shapes with the pencil on the colored paper.
- The children can cut out the shapes.
- Put all the shapes in the center of the table.
- The children can create shape pictures using the shapes and gluing them to a piece of white paper.

You may want to make this a two-part activity. Part 1 can be the tracing and cutting. Part 2 can be creating the shape pictures.





Ten Little Apples – finger play

(Hold up fingers to match each number)



Ten little apples hanging on the tree,
One fell off and nine we could see.

Nine little apples looking all around,
One fell down and hit the ground.

Eight little apples left up there,
Another fell off and flew through the air.

Seven little apples hanging on that tree,
Wondering who the next will be.

Six little apples way up high,
Another decided it was time to fly.

Down he went and landed on the ground,
Then five little apples were all we found.

The fifth little apple decided to go,
So four little apples were left in a row.

Four little apples up there in the tree,
Another one fell and then there were three.

Three little apples not making a sound,
One more fell to join others on the ground.

Two little apples hanging high in the air,
The next one left, to see what was there.

Now one little apple hanging near a nest,
Decided to fall and join the rest.



Taste and See

This activity involves tasting, colors, and math.

What you need:

- Apples of various kinds and colors

What to do:

- Ask the children to identify the colors of the apples.
- Cut the apples in small pieces. Have the children taste different types.
- Record their favorites.
- Make a chart to show which ones they liked the best.

Dietary cautions

- Be aware of choking risks and food allergies when preparing and serving meals and snacks. Think about the size, shape, and consistency when choosing foods due to the potential choking risks in children. Food cut in large chunks, small hard foods, and soft and sticky foods should be avoided. The top choking hazards for children include: hotdogs, meats, sausages, fish with bones, spoonfuls of peanut butter, popcorn, chips, pretzel nuggets, raisins,

whole grapes, raw carrots, fruits and vegetables with skins, and marshmallows. Be sure that food is cut in small pieces (no larger than ½ inch), grated, or finely chopped. Be sure that children are closely supervised when they are eating.

- Do not give honey to children under 12 months of age. Honey contains spores that can cause infant botulism.
- Many children have food allergies or sensitivities to food. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 90% of children's food allergies are from milk, eggs, peanuts,

tree nuts (pecan/walnuts), fish, shellfish, strawberries, soy, wheat, and gluten. Carefully read food labels for potential risks and be sure to ask the parents if children have a known allergy or sensitivity.

- Dental health is a growing concern with young children, so it is important to keep in mind that starchy, sticky, and sugary foods can cause tooth decay. Children should brush their teeth after any meal or snack, but particularly when you serve these foods.

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Supported by funds from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, a joint office of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare.

Ask questions that get children thinking

Every day you have chances to help build children’s brain power by what you say and do. Start by learning how to have great conversations with children. A good question can open a child up and get him talking about his own ideas. The best questions are open-ended — questions that have no right or wrong answers.

Here are ten great questions to ask. Get ready to be surprised. You’ll love the answers kids give you!

1. **The best question to ask children of all ages is, “What do you think?”** This is a great response when a child asks you a why question like “Why is the sky blue?”
2. **“What do you wonder about _____?”** Fill in the blank with anything (the weather, tigers, babies, etc.) Early childhood professionals can list what the group wants to know, then use the list as a base for planned books and activities.
3. **“What do you know about it?”** If you are planning on teaching the children something, ask them about what they already know before you tell them anything. “What can you tell me about neighborhood helpers?” can be a great question before starting to teach. You will discover what the children know already, or what they misunderstand.
4. **“What can you tell me about your...?”** Children’s creations, including pictures and block structures, may represent something that is completely different than what you thought it was. Let the child explain instead of jumping to conclusions.
5. **“What do you think will happen next?”** Use this question whenever possible: reading a story, cooking, or doing an experiment. This gives children a chance to make predictions.
6. **“What made it happen?”** This gives children a chance to guess about what caused something else. This is great to ask in a group because once children start talking, they will learn from each other.
7. **“What is the problem?”** To help children problem-solve, ask each child to explain the problem as they see it. Don’t let other children interrupt.
8. **“What else could we do?”** This is great when the children have a problem, such as wanting to put a chair inside the plastic playhouse and it won’t fit through the door. This encourages children to find new solutions to their problems by thinking creatively.
9. **“What do we know now?”** Great to use after an experiment or at the end of a surprising story. The bonus is that caregivers can discover how much the children really understood about what happened.
10. **“How can you make it?”** Preschool children are bursting with ideas. An important caregiver role is to help children find ways to use some of their great ideas. Give the children a chance to do it their way. Do they want to make a paper boat that is doomed to sink? Let them try. Failure is one of the best teachers. Help them stick with the project when they become frustrated. If it isn’t working, help them find another way by asking again: “How can you make it?”

Listening is also very important. Really take the time to listen to the children’s ideas. Becoming a great listener can help you to make great conversations with children and to find more great questions that stretch their thinking.

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Intentional practice supports children's emergent literacy development



Recognizing letters and their sounds

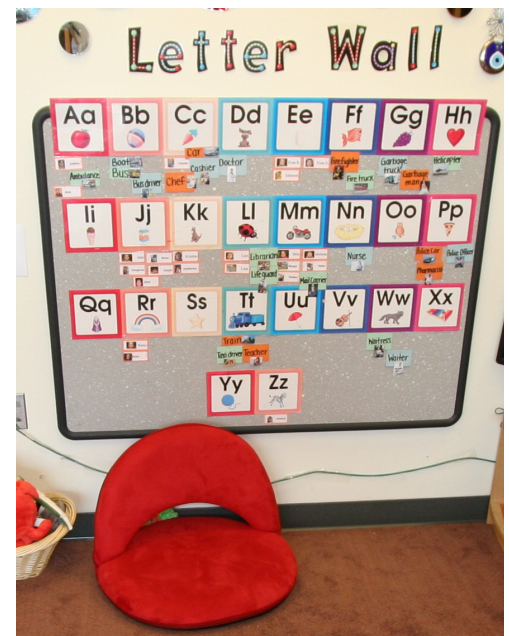


Learning letters and their sounds is something children need to know in order to become successful readers. Educators can help support this learning by intentionally planning ways to incorporate letter learning throughout the preschool day in developmentally appropriate ways.

What educators can do to support development:

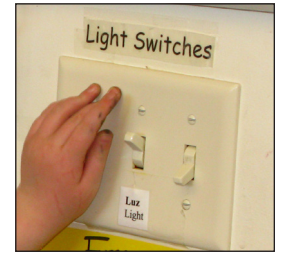
- Point out letters and their sounds to children in books, games, their own writing, your writing, and in print around the room.
- Provide alphabet books, alphabet puzzles, letter matching games, and alphabet letters in a variety of places around the room (in the writing center, on the wall, at center time). Talk about the letters and letter sounds in each context. For example, "You just put the letter T in the alphabet puzzle. Just like the T in your name Tom. T makes the 't' sound." Reinforce the letter name and sound as you interact with children.
- Refer to children's written names, and the letters in their names at many different times of the day. Have children sign in with their name card. Use name cards to chart children's experiences (who may like a certain food, color, activity...). Talk about the similarities and differences in the letters in names.
- Go on letter hunts inside and outside of the classroom to spy letters. Reinforce the letter names and sounds.

- Play hands-on alphabet games with letters at small group times.
- Point out letters in book titles and print that interest children. Reinforce the letter names and sounds.
- Respond to children when they ask about letters while writing or at other times during the day.
- Be aware and intentional in reinforcing letter learning during everyday activities, throughout the day.



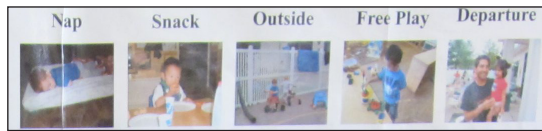
Environmental print and recognizing familiar words (sight words)

Focusing on print in the environment helps children connect meaning to the world around them. When educators intentionally make reference to print in and around the classroom, they support the development of print awareness and blossoming word recognition. Educators who intentionally label and point out words in the classroom help children begin to build these recognition skills.



What educators can do to support development:

- Use children’s names for a learning base. Have children use their name cards to sign in and out. Show name cards and say names as you choose helpers for the day, do graphing or charting activities, and have children identify which centers they choose. Over time, children will begin to recognize their names. Put children’s photos on name cards to help them begin to recognize their names and their friends’ names.



- Label the environment. Create a print rich room by clearly labeling containers and items around the room with words and pictures.
- Point out print inside and outside of the environment throughout the day. Make reference to signs (“That sign says stop”),

- Point out words on a morning message, chart, graph or other writing in the classroom.
- Point out fun, interesting words in books (like “splish, splash”).
- Take time to answer children’s questions about words they are curious about throughout the day. For example, a child may want to know what the word on her backpack says.
- Write words children are curious about on index cards for their use. Many preschoolers enjoy being able to use words that interest them in their own play and writing. For example, a child may bring the word card “Truck stop” to the block area to use in play, or a child might ask for the word “love” to be written on a card to use in a message to a family member.



the names of centers, labels you have used in centers and around the room, and children’s names.

Be aware of the many meaningful learning opportunities that emerge during the day and build on each child’s prior knowledge. Provide more challenges as children build letter knowledge.



Make the most of reading with children

Reading with infants and toddlers

When reading with infants and toddlers, caregivers can point to the pictures in books and tell children what they are seeing. For example, "There's the dog. The dog says, 'Woof!'" Caregivers should be sensitive to the child's needs in the moment and keep book reading times short, fun and engaging. When infants and toddlers are read to, they experience the enjoyment of a close adult-child bond, are hearing adult language and building language skills, and are beginning to learn the conventions of how to hold a book, how to turn pages and how to treat books.

Reading with 2-year-olds

Children at this age love songs, rhymes, and books with repetitive language. They feel excited and powerful when they've succeeded in using words to connect with a friend or caregiver in a meaningful way. Many twos want to read a favorite book again and again. Responsive caregivers take advantage of these book opportunities and have conversations with children about things that interest children and relate to their lives. For example, the educator can point out

something a child may like to do that is shown in a book illustration and then follow up with an open-ended question: "That girl is playing on the swings! Where do you like to play?" Some twos may not yet have the words to share a lot about what they see in books. Sensitive caregivers point out different pictures in books and talk about what they see and what is going on in the story.

Reading with preschoolers

Preschoolers' language is blossoming. Helping children expand their language and comprehension skills not only helps them feel successful, but also provides an important base for getting ready to read. Encourage conversation and expand on what preschoolers say, introducing new vocabulary that is at the appropriate level for each child. Follow up with an open-ended question. For example if a child says, "There's the dog," the educator may say, "That spotted dog is jumping on the fire truck. What did you see when we visited the fire station?" When reading with preschool children, ask questions about the illustrations, what might happen next, something that relates to a child's experience, and how a character feels.

Ideas for book conversation starters

Favorite book: _____

Open-ended questions/conversation starters: _____



Phonological awareness activities for preschoolers

Phonological awareness activities involve listening for and manipulating the **sounds** in spoken language. Phonological awareness is different from phonics, which focuses on the association between letters and their **sounds**. Exposing preschoolers to games that focus on the **sounds** in language is an important stepping-stone on the road to reading. Early childhood educators can engage children in phonological awareness activities at small group times, transition times, center times or meal times. Educators who provide preschoolers with opportunities to explore the **sounds** in language support children's emergent literacy development.

The typical sequence of phonological awareness moves from easier activities (listening) to more challenging activities (blending and segmenting) and includes:

- 1. Listening:** Listening for sounds and for the differences in sounds, like tapping vs. clapping.
- 2. Rhyming:** Exposing children to words that sound the same, like cat and hat.
- 3. Alliteration:** Emphasizing the same beginning sound in a song, poem, book or finger play, like "Willoughby, Wallaby, Woo."
- 4. Words and sentences:** Understanding that words make up sentences or phrases, for example, listening for and counting the words in the phrase "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."
- 5. Syllables:** Identifying the syllables in a word, for example, clapping the syllables in a child's name.
- 6. Blending and segmenting sounds:** Adding and taking away sounds in a spoken word, for example, taking the "c" sound away in the spoken word cat and understanding what is left is the spoken word "at."

The following are examples of some activities in each skill area. This is not a complete list, but is meant to show the different types of activities in each skill area.

Additional resource: *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children* by Marilyn Adams

Listening activities:

1. Children close their eyes and listen as you make a sound. Then children guess the sound. Add two or three sounds in a row as children become better at the game.
2. Make sound shakers out of small containers. Show children what items are in each container (for example, beans, cotton ball, button, coins). Mix up the sound containers and have children listen to the sound each makes and guess what is inside. As children become better at the game, add an additional matching container of another material. Have children listen and choose the matching sound containers.

Rhyming activities:

1. Sing rhyming songs with children like "Willoughby Wallaby," do finger plays like "The Itsy, Bitsy, Spider" and read rhyming books like *Moose on the Loose* or *Fox in Socks*. Emphasize the rhyming words.
2. Gather small props or pictures that represent rhyming objects (car-star, chair-bear, cat-hat, house-mouse, bell-shell). Hold up an object or picture. Pass around a rhyming box with three items or pictures in it, with one item that rhymes with the object you hold. Ask children to choose a rhyming object from the box that rhymes with your item. Emphasize the rhyming words. Play several rounds of the game holding up different objects.

Alliteration activities

1. Read books like *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood, *Pigs in Pajamas* by Maggie Smith, and *Some Smug Slug* by Pamela Duncan Edwards. Emphasize the same beginning sound in words as you read.
2. Use children's names as a base for alliteration activities. Have children do movements that match their names (Maria marches, Devin dances, Jessie jumps, Chris crawls). Emphasize the same beginning sound in the name and movement.

Syllable activities

1. Explain to children that syllables are parts of words. Model clapping out the syllables in your name. Have children help you clap out the syllables in their names and count the syllables or parts.
2. Explain to children that syllables are parts of words. Model clapping out the syllables of a word. Pass a Syllable Box around with small props or pictures for children to choose from. After a child chooses a prop or picture, have the group clap out the syllables in the word and count the syllables.

Segmenting and blending activities

These activities are more challenging for children and are introduced after children have had many opportunities to practice less challenging skills.

1. Play a guessing game. Use props or pictures. Tell children you're going to give them some clues, or ways to figure out what the object is that you have chosen. For example, say, "I'm thinking of an animal. Its name starts with the "c" sound (say the sound not the letter) and has an "a" sound (say the sound not the letter) in the middle and ends with a "t" sound (say the sound not the letter)." Say the sounds again for the group. "It has four legs and whiskers. Who can tell me what it might be?" After a child guesses "cat," show the children the prop or picture of the cat and blend the beginning, middle and ending sounds together again to model for the children.
2. Have children "take apart" or "put together" a word. Use words from familiar finger plays, songs or rhymes like "The Itsy, Bitsy Spider." Use props or pictures to make the game more fun. Say something like, "I need you to help me put a word back together. (Say the word in parts) Spi---der. Who can tell me what word that is?" Emphasize the blending of the word after children give the correct response and show them the prop or picture.



Ways to support young children's writing

1-year-olds and toddlers

Provide non-toxic writing, painting and drawing materials to children.

Talk to children as they make marks on a writing surface, describing what you see. For example, "You made a big dot on the white board!"

Provide materials and physical support so young children can explore making marks and drawing throughout the day.

Model how to use writing and drawing materials so children learn what they can do with the materials.

Support and encourage all attempts at making marks and drawing!

2-year-olds

Provide a dedicated writing center with paper, pencils, crayons and markers, as well as writing materials in all centers for children to explore. Provide support in centers for writing exploration.

Talk with children about their drawings and scribbles. Ask children if they would like you to caption their work.

Offer children opportunities to display their work if they would like.

Model writing alongside children while talking about what you are writing. This kind of support helps build language skills and helps supports budding literacy skills.

Support all attempts at making marks and drawing!

Integrate writing into daily activities.

Preschoolers

Provide writing materials in a dedicated writing center, as well as in all areas of the environment to encourage children's writing exploration (pencils, markers, crayons, paper of all kinds, rulers, alphabet strips, stampers and cards with children's names and important words). Offer clipboards with paper and pencil attached for writing and drawing during outside time and during center times. Have individual child journals in the classroom that are accessible to children throughout the day.

Talk with children about their drawing and writing, focusing on the things that are meaningful to the child. For example, instead of asking, "What is it?" ask the child, "Can you tell me about your drawing (writing)?" Ask the child if he would like you to write the caption or story for him.

Model the writing process. Young children benefit from seeing writing used for a variety of purposes. Educators who model writing throughout the day help children see the value of writing. For example, write a daily message, write notes and lists, write on charts and graphs, and make labels. When children see the meaning, value and uses of writing, they will be more interested in the writing process. Integrate writing into daily activities.

Provide writing journals. Many children enjoy sharing their stories. Early childhood educators can encourage and support children's storytelling by recording children's stories in journals.

Offer specific support as children move through the writing process. Many children will ask how to spell words. Make time to answer children's questions about writing and to guide them during these meaningful experiences. As children show interest and develop their writing skills, offer support and encouragement to keep motivation high!

Active Language & Literacy Play

The Early Learning Guidelines provide information related to seven universal areas of child development and learning, called domains. One of these learning guidelines is Language and Literacy Development. Language and literacy skills develop through talking, listening, playing, reading, writing, and learning the skills used to communicate. Children develop the foundation for all communication in the early childhood years. They begin with nonverbal interactions (smiling, facial expression, gestures), and then gradually move toward spoken language, sign language, or alternative communication methods to practice the rules of communication in their culture and family. Between three and five years of age, children begin to understand how oral language is reflected in written symbols (letters), and learn to create written symbols to communicate their ideas. Language and literacy development is promoted and supported through play, especially pretend play, and through music rhyme, and rhythm. –Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines

These skills can be developed during children's everyday, active play. Following are active play ideas that support language and literacy development

Backyard or swimming scrabble

The scrabble pieces are sponges. Put numbers or letters on the sponges with a permanent marker.

- Five-year-olds – find the letters of their name and put in order.
- Three-year-olds – pair up letters or numbers that match.
- Two-year-olds – find same color sponges and put in a row.



These sponges work for many more combinations, depending on the age of the child. In a swimming pool, children can find them and put in a row either on the edge of the pool or in the pool.



Water balloon splash

Fill different colors of balloons with water. Adults or children can hide them outside, and other children find one balloon at a time. They bring balloons back to a sidewalk or driveway where chalk shapes are drawn: square, rectangle, circle, triangle, diamond, or more complicated shapes for older children such as trapezoid and hexagon. The goal is for the child to name the color of the balloon they found, and to identify the shape they throw it into to make a splash! Variations can include letters or numbers for children to identify on the balloons.

Read aloud

Read aloud books, for example, the book *Ten Apples Up On Top* by Dr. Seuss. Every time the reader says "UP" the children stand and reach for the sky! There are other actions that they can do in the book, too!



Letter race

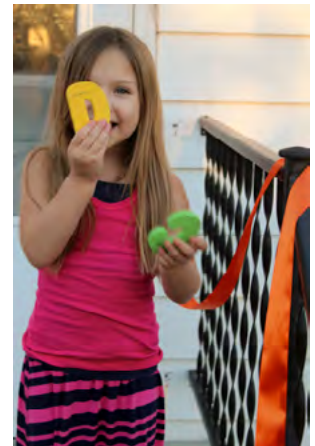
This game requires some open floor space: the more space, the better. Place letter magnets on one side of the room. Place a magnet board or a magnetic pan on the other side of the room. Children stand next to the magnet board on the opposite side of the room from all of the letters. When the leader calls out a letter and its sound, children run and find the letter, pick it up, and place it on the magnet board next to them. Make it exciting for by saying "Ready-set-go! Pick up the letter ____ that makes this sound ____!"

For five-year-olds, ask what letter makes a sound first, then when they guess it, say "Ready-set-go!"

Children can race to get the letters to spell their name. Younger children can race for the first letter of their name.

String scavenger hunt

The children follow a string from the starting point to find letters, numbers, colored plates (or white plates with colors or colored shapes). Children carry a small bag for the letters, numbers, or colored plates, and when they have followed the string to the end, they return to the start and identify what they found.



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Rich language and responsive feedback

Children need language to relate to and interact with others well. Research shows that the rich conversations and language adults use with young children provide a strong foundation for children's overall development.

Follow children's leads in conversations. Talk with children during all interactions—mealtimes, center times, group times, and routine times—about something that relates to their experiences and is interesting to them. Use these practices to support rich language and responsive feedback:

Comment and describe

Professionals support budding language when they comment on and describe the child's actions. For example, the professional might say, "You built a big tower with the red blocks. I wonder what you are going to build next."

Introduce new vocabulary

Use new words often with children in conversations, in multiple settings and experiences. For example, if a child makes a short comment like "The duck," add something more such as "The yellow duck is swimming in the water." Add words that stretch the child's language, but keep the original meaning of what the child says. Build on what children say by extending language and adding new words that connect to the topic of conversation.

Model

Modeling is an intentional way of presenting something children need to learn.

For example, the child might say, "I like apples." The adult responds, "I like apples, too, especially green apples – they are a yummy, delicious fruit!" This teacher used words to teach types of apples, and that they are a fruit.

Responsive feedback

Children say very little when prompted to talk on the spot. Connect during natural moments and notice when children have something to say. Preschool professionals can use observation to decide when to add conversations and when to step back and observe. Conversations should be authentic, relatable, and never forced.



Choose phrases that make connections

Capture and build on what the children are wondering about and want to investigate. A carefully chosen phrase can transform a child's idea into an inquiry. In the book *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning*, Ann S. Epstein recommends that educators choose language "that encourages children to reflect on and discuss the work. Such a dialogue develops naturally when adults interact as partners with children."

Provide feedback

Feedback that hints at new ideas is one way to scaffold children's learning, to help them think at deeper levels, and to connect to other learning. A small question can lead to a big discovery.

*"Questions can be like a lever you use to pry open the stuck lid on a paint can."
– Fran Peave*

Open-ended prompts and questions

Teachers can use questions and prompts to facilitate higher-level thinking skills and to connect to developmental skills children are working towards. Avoid asking children questions to which they already know the answers. There are better ways for children to learn than quizzing them with questions such as "What color is this?" or "What number is this?" The Right Question Institute states, "Questioning is the ability to organize our thinking around what we don't know."

Ask open-ended questions, or hint with open-ended prompts.
For example:

"I wonder if we...."

"Suppose that...."

"What do you think would happen if we...."

"Tell me how you made this."

"I noticed that...."

"Describe how you...."

"How do you know this?"

Language development is intertwined with all the domains of learning—physical, cognitive, and social and emotional.

Include feeling talk during book reading

An important way to support feeling talk during the day is when educators read books with children. When children are involved in discussions of how a character might be feeling and why, they develop a better understanding of emotions and learn feeling word vocabulary. They also learn more about what causes people to feel different ways, and how feelings can affect behaviors.

While the adult reads with children:

- **Point out the facial expressions in pictures that show how a character might be feeling.**

"Look at the girl's face. How do you think she is feeling?"

- **Help children think about why a character feels a certain way, and what happened to make the character feel that way.**

"Why do you think Sophie is feeling mad? What happened to make her feel mad?"

- **Help children think about how feelings affect behaviors.**

"Sophie was feeling mad. What did Sophie do when she was feeling mad?"

- **Build an understanding that feelings can change in different situations.**

"How does Sophie look now? How did she look at the beginning of the story?"

- **Ask children about their emotions.**

"When was a time that you felt mad? Can you tell me about a time when you felt happy?"

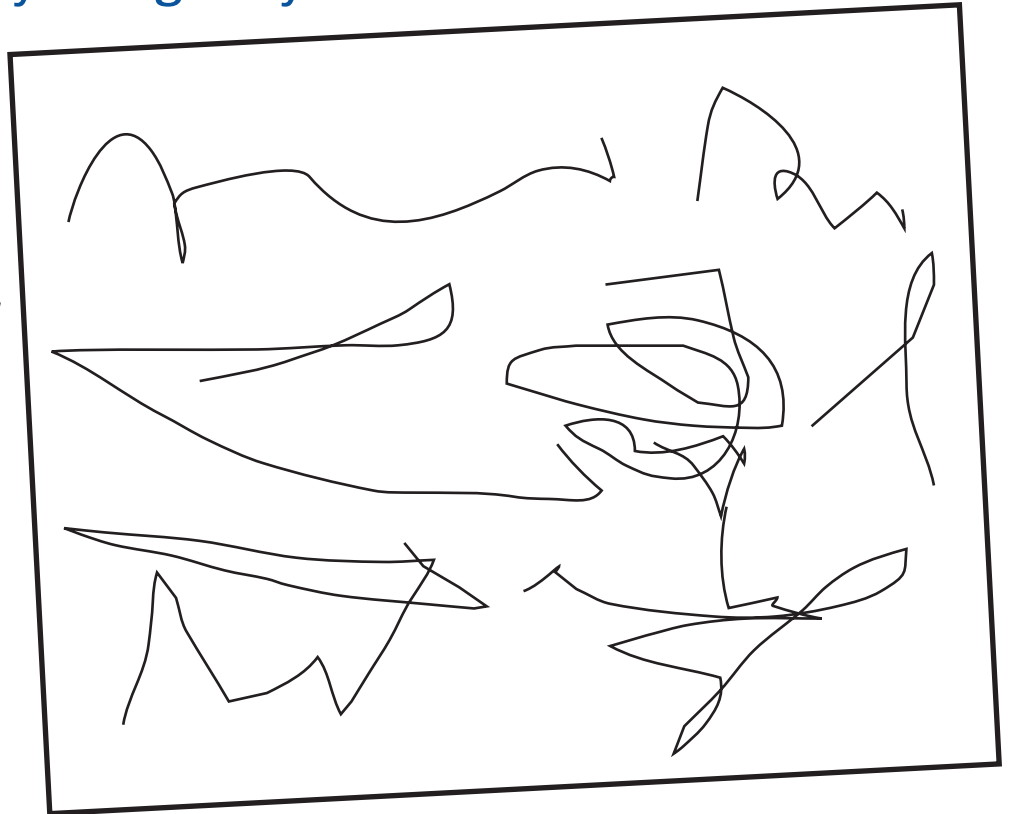


Scribbles have meaning

Look at the picture in the box below.

Does it mean anything to you?

Scribbles may not make any sense to an adult. They look like a lot of lines, loops, and squiggles. But these marks are very important to a young child. They are a child's way of writing her thoughts. Drawing and scribbling are the first steps in using the skills children will need later for writing.



Encourage scribbling and drawing

- Set out paper, pencils, crayons, and markers so children can use them to scribble or draw whenever they want to.
- Ask parents to bring office paper that's printed on one side. The children will enjoy scribbling and drawing on the back side of the paper and it's free!
- Put away coloring books. Allow children to be free to create their own pictures and use their own ideas. It doesn't matter if adults can't identify what the child is drawing. The child knows and that's what is important.
- Encourage children to use their scribbling skills during play. They may like to make signs if they are playing with cars and trucks or pretending they are running a store. Cut paper into smaller pieces for children to make their own play money and cash register receipts. Clip several pieces of paper together to make a pad for waiters and waitresses to write down orders in a restaurant.
- When children are having a hard day or missing mom, ask them if they would like to write a letter or draw a picture. Drawing and writing are good ways to help children get out their emotions.

Drawing and scribbling are the first steps in learning to write.

Talking about drawings and scribblings

What do you say when a child shows you drawing or scribbling? Ask the child to explain what is written. To children, making marks on paper is more important than what the marks look like.

Caregivers may want to talk about how marks were made or what they are seeing.

“You were pressing really hard on the crayon right here, and it’s lighter over here.”

“Look how big these lines are.”

“How did you get that crayon to make that line?”

“You made some little tiny dots and a long curvy line.”

If a child shows some scribbles and asks, “What did I write?”, the caregiver could ask him, “What do you want it to say?” or “What were you thinking about when you were working on it?”

Set out lots of paper, pencils, crayons, and markers so children can draw or scribble whenever they want.

Make drawing and scribbling important

- Hang drawings and scribblings on the walls where children can see them.
- Ask a child to tell about her picture. Write down what she says on a piece of paper. Read what she said back to her.
- Some children will not want others to see their scribblings, especially if an older child or parent has made negative comments about scribbling. You can help these children by talking about scribbling as “working on your writing.”
- Talk with parents about drawing and scribbling as the first step in learning to write.



extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare

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Developmental language suggestions

Research shows supporting early language experiences supports future literacy success. Well-informed early care and education (ECE) professionals can give children a strong foundation in language development—and make it fun!

Language suggestions for newborns and infants:

Explain routines by “talking” the action (“Lola, you need your diaper changed. I’m going to pick you up and go to the diaper table... here we go...”).

Orally label people and things relevant to their lives, such as siblings, toys, and pets. (“Lola, here comes your brother Ben. Ben wants to show you his picture!”).

Offer response time for infant to coo or respond or just to learn the “timing” of conversing with another.

Imitate an infant’s sounds and encourage him to imitate you.

Play interactive games such as peek-a-boo, patty cake, this little piggy.

Sing and provide opportunities to hear music.

Read and have books available for holding and looking at (cloth, plastic, and cardboard books made for babies).

Language suggestions for toddlers:

When children offer simple language, such as “dog,” can expand the language by replying, “Yes, that’s Henry the dog. He’s wagging his tail.”

Expand actions. For example, to a child drinking a big cup of water, say “You must have been so thirsty; you drank the whole cup of water!”

Ask open-ended questions. For example, “What do you think Henry the dog is trying to tell us?” or “How can I get Henry’s ball from under the table?”

Connect with labels and visuals by adding pictures, photographs, and labels to items in the environment.

Provide experiences in rhyming, finger plays, chants, and response stories, and offer materials to experiment in drawing, writing, and painting.



Language suggestions for older toddlers and preschoolers:

Offer multiple ways to express ideas (verbally, drawing/writing, acting out, picture cues, art, books, photographs, journals).

Introduce interesting and varied vocabulary, often repeating a word with other words of the same meaning (big, large, huge).

Encourage children to tell their stories while you write them down

Create writing centers with paper, envelopes, mailboxes, stamps, and lists of names.

Act out familiar stories, made up stories, and even the children's invented stories.

Support and implement small group experiences that encourage children to interact and share ideas (art projects, building projects, dramatic play).

Have children help make labels for items/materials in the environment.

Provide paper, pencils, clipboards, in conjunction with other activities such as dramatic play, blocks, and outside time.

Encourage problem solving as well as predictions, possibilities, and opinions ("How can we fix this problem? What might happen? What do we need to do? How do you feel about that?").

Provide materials to pretend and practice real life experiences, such as dramatic play materials (cooking, babies, driving, grocery shopping, etc.).



Tell a Tale!

“Stories build bridges from person to person and generation to generation.” (Bill Wood, storyteller)

Whether true or imagined, stories are captivating. Storytelling in many parts of the world is the primary way that family history, cultural practices, and values are passed from one generation to another. Stories bind people together and remind them who they are.

In early care, teachers can model oral storytelling and nurture that skill in children. Both telling and listening to stories develops valuable skills. NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) encourages staff to involve families and to help children stay “cognitively, linguistically, and culturally connected” to their home language and culture. (NAEYC 2009) Storytelling can help meet those goals.

Storytelling Development Advantages:

When children use their minds to create images based on words (rather than being provided with images in a book or on screen), they develop abstract thinking skills – being able to think about something without a real object in front of them. These skills improve language, math, and science learning where abstract concepts are frequent and where symbols represent ideas. Each new story requires a child to form new brain connections. (Wood) Listening to stories also contributes to social and emotional development as children feel for the characters. “Listening to stories also helps children become more confident, creative and resilient.” (Wood)

Storytelling Tips:

Model Storytelling – Teachers can tell stories rather than always reading from a book. Ask family or community members to share a story or a riddle or a ballad that they learned as a child. Ask older children to retell stories they know to younger children – famous nursery rhymes or fairy tales. This works especially well in OST (out-of-school-time) programs during transitions. Memorized silly poems like ones by Jack Prelutsky or Shel Silverstein can be the basis for impromptu stories.

Use Story Starters –

- “When I was your age.....”
- Post card or photo album ideas.
- Use the word of the week as many times as possible in a story.
- Story Bag (tell a story based on objects drawn from a bag).

Appeal to Many Learning Styles –

“Storytelling allows you to engage all ways of knowing – the whole brain – what Howard Gardner calls the Multiple Intelligences.” (Norfolk 2009) It is especially appealing to children who have print-processing challenges, like children with dyslexia. These children’s brains struggle to receive letters and words in typical ways, so hearing a story rather than reading one is easier and more enjoyable. “Most African storytellers innately integrate all forms of art into the process of conveying their story.” They use song, percussion, dance, and drama to enhance the words of the story as it is told. (Burnett 2010) Keep a basket of props, instruments, and fabric ready. Fabric can become a table cloth, cape, apron, blanket, or animal’s skin. Encourage children to change their voices with each character. As one person describes

the scene, listeners can become actors, acting out what they hear. Stories can be sung, for example, "John Henry" or "There's a Hole in the Bucket."

"If we ... recognize and respect the fact that ... [listeners] possess various types of learning intelligences such as oral, tactile, kinesthetic learners, etc., we are compelled to connect with them in our storytelling through various types of art expressions such as singing, drawing, dance or movement, etc." (Burnett 2010)

Encourage the Timid – For a hesitant child, a teacher could use a question and answer format. Open-ended questions avoid quick "Yes" or "No" dead-end responses. Modified show-and-tell, where two or three children share each day, gives children a familiar item to tell a story about. To share the responsibility, one person holds a token and begins a story, then passes the token to the next person in the group who adds a sentence or two. The story continues until each person has added a portion to the tale. Children can work in pairs or trios to build confidence. Stories can be told in a smaller venue like a story corner rather than the stage prepared for the more practiced child.

Tap Into Technology – Digital video cameras can be used to record oral tales. Allow children to listen to them frequently and fine-tune their craft. This appeals to the auditory learner. Exchange recorded stories with students from another area. Ask an international student to video chat and tell his or her story. Hearing a real life story can deepen understanding. "We could have read several novels and looked over historical documents ..., but the power of learning through this impromptu interview and exchange far surpassed the learning opportunities schools usually offer students." (Ryan)

For more tips on storytelling in early childhood classrooms, check out:

"Stories to Act Out" at

<http://www.betterkidcare.psu.edu/TIPS/TIPS0707.pdf>

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*"A well told story can make children laugh, squeal, gasp or cry."
(Bill Wood, Storyteller)*

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