



Activities for Promoting Early Literacy

(for children ages 3 to 5)

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Talking and listening, and reading and writing provide a lifetime of enjoyment. Catching up with family and friends through phone calls or letters, talking about your day with a loved one, and reading a good book or daily newspaper all bring pleasure to our lives. Unfortunately, current research suggests that young children may not be having the early learning experiences they need to become skilled with the tools of literacy: talking and listening, and reading and writing.

This book contains a variety of activities to promote children's interest in literacy. The activities have been organized according to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's *Early Childhood Literacy Standards*. These standards address:

<i>Symbolic Development</i>	4
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The activities can be done at home and in early childhood programs. Some can be setup and used for an entire day. Others are designed for short learning experiences (5 to 10 minutes) with small groups of children. All of the activities will inspire children's delight and mastery in the tools of literacy: talking and listening, and reading and writing.

How to Create a Literacy-Rich Environment

- ✓ Use word and language games, songs, poems, nursery rhymes, books, and fingerplays every day.
- ✓ Use nametags. For young children, the most important letter is the first letter of their first name. Create activities that use children's names, such as having children distribute nametags at the start of the day.
- ✓ When displaying written words, such as children's names (Bethany) or furniture labels (table), use lower case and upper case letters as appropriate.
- ✓ Establish a literacy center and supply it with pens, pencils, markers, paper, envelopes, old greeting cards, stationary, stamps, a dictionary, telephone books, a list of teacher's and children's names with photos, mailboxes, and anything else that you can think of!
- ✓ Use small groups of 4 to 5 children for direct teaching about early literacy concepts, such as the sounds of language.
- ✓ Be a good role model — write notes, wear a nametag, keep a calendar and daily planner, post lists of children's responsibilities, share program policies and weekly activity plans with parents, introduce new vocabulary words ("How many different ways can you say big?").



Symbolic Development

Children represent feelings and ideas in a variety of ways.

Bathing Baby Dolls

During the preschool years, children begin to show care and concern for others. This activity allows children to express their feelings of care, through words and actions, while enjoying sensory play in soapy water.

Arrange 3 or 4 baby-sized bath tubs on a table with a drop-cloth underneath; put a small amount of water and mild dish soap in tubs and allow children to wash water-safe baby dolls. Provide soft blankets or towels for bundling the dolls after bathtime. Encourage children to talk about what they are doing and how it makes them feel. For inside or outside play.



Symbolic Development

Children represent feelings and ideas in a variety of ways.

Creative Movement

Preschool children love to pretend! Use circle time to encourage children to creatively move like the animals in the poem. As children become more familiar with the words and actions, post the written text and ask children to identify words that rhyme.

Jump or Jiggle

Evelyn Beyer

Frogs jump
Caterpillars hump

Worms wiggle
Bugs jiggle

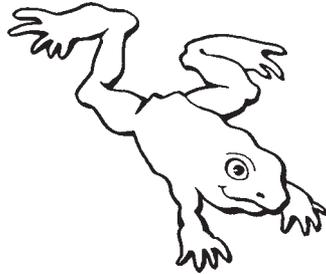
Rabbits hop
Horses clop

Snakes slide
Seagulls glide

Mice creep
Deer leap

Puppies bounce
Kittens pounce

Lions stalk –
But –
I walk!



Symbolic Development

Children represent feelings and ideas in a variety of ways.

Painting to Music

Different kinds of music make children have different feelings. Preschool children often express themselves through creative activities, such as painting.

Prepare an easel or table-top painting activity and set-up a tape or C.D. player nearby (watersafe, if possible!). Select a variety of music, such as classical, music from different countries, or lullabys, for children to listen to while they are painting. Ask children how the music makes them feel and how their painting expresses these feelings.



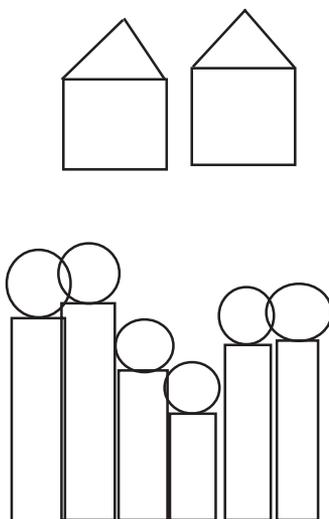
Spoken/Expressive Language

Children use language to communicate ideas, feelings, questions or to solve problems.

Felt Family

Children like to talk about their families. “*Felt Family*” allows children to select felt figures to represent their family members, to arrange them in their homes, and to tell others about them.

Using yarn and straight pins, create the outline of two large, 5-sided house shapes on a felt board. Using brightly colored felt, create 20 figures of varying sizes. Place the felt figures on the floor in front of the felt board and, in groups of 4 or 5 children, let children take turns telling the group about their family; allow children to say as much or as little as they want and avoid correcting their descriptions.

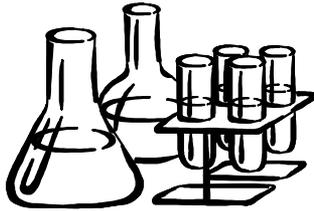


Spoken/Expressive Language

Children use language to communicate ideas, feelings, questions or to solve problems.

Mixing Colors

Preschool children are young scientists! They enjoy using everyday items to experiment and solve problems.



Using red, blue, and yellow colored water, make several trays of little ice cubes. Provide children with empty baby food jars, pitchers of warm water, and eye droppers. Give children the colored ice cubes in small batches and allow them to mix different colors with the ice cubes and warm water in the baby food jars. Encourage children to talk about their experiences and to keep track of the different colors they make and discover. Ask children to explain what happens to the ice and to predict what will happen when different colors, such as blue and yellow, are mixed together.

Spoken/Expressive Language

Children use language to communicate ideas, feelings, questions or to solve problems.

Problem Solving with Puppets

Learning social skills is an important part of being a preschooler. Skilled teachers use naturally occurring events, such as those listed below, to help children learn how to get along.

This activity can be done during circle time or with small groups of children. Use puppets and other props to act out a story. Strive to help children understand the problem and their feelings and to practice talking about them.

Possible stories:

- ✓ The positive things that children do
- ✓ Problems that children have with getting along
- ✓ Act out stressful situations (birth of a new sibling, something gets broken or spilled)
- ✓ Disguise and recycle real program incidents, such as problems with sharing or using an inside voice



Listening/Receptive Language

Children listen for different purposes.

Simon Says

Preschool children are preparing for kindergarten and elementary school, a time when carefully listening and following directions is an important part of school success. Help children practice their listening skills with non-competitive games such as “Simon Says”.

During circle time, select a child to be “Simon” and have this child instruct the group to perform actions such as “touch your nose”, “reach for the ceiling”, “dance with your neighbor”. Encourage children to listen and follow the directions; allow other children to be Simon.



Listening/Receptive Language

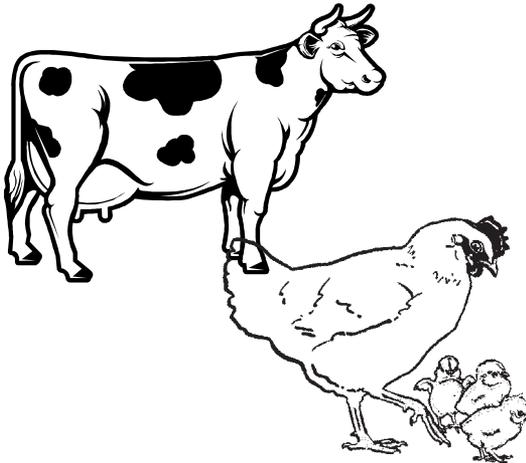
Children listen for different purposes.

Animal Sounds

This activity encourages children to identify and distinguish different sounds made by animals.

Materials: Animal pictures/photos or toy animals, recorded animal sounds

For a class field trip, bring the children to a nearby place (e.g., petting zoo, pet store, animal shelter) to see animals up close and listen to the sounds they make. Take pictures and record the animal sounds with a tape recorder. Later, in small groups, distribute pictures of the animals or animal toys to each child and play the sounds recorded, ask the children to identify and match pictures and sounds. If the sounds are not distinguishable, ask children to make the sounds of their animal in the picture.



Listening/Receptive Language

Children listen for different purposes.

Magic Word

This activity encourages children to listen for specific words or phrases.

During transitions, give children a magic word to listen for. Tell them that when they hear a specific word, they can do the next daily routine. For example, you can use the word ***caboose*** as the magic word to mean “go put your coat on.” Use the magic word in a short story or a list of words to get the transition started.

How Else?

- √ Have a child pick the magic word.
- √ Make the magic word a repeated word such as *beep-beep*.
- √ Make the magic word a two-word phrase such as *noodle maker*.

caboose ***fuzzy face***
beep-beep ***noodle maker***

Written Language

Children use writing as a means of expression/communication.

Greeting Cards

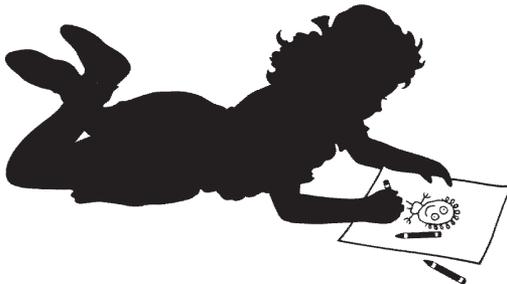
For centuries, people have kept in touch with written communication. Letters and cards can be used to say “thank you”, “I’m sorry”, and “I love you”. This activity lets children draw, scribble, write letters, and use writing to express themselves.

Materials: Paper, envelopes, and markers.

Encourage children to make greeting cards. Ask them to write the name of the person they want to give the card to on the envelope. Anticipate and support a range of writing styles—drawing, squiggles, letter-like forms, actual letters, and words—in any combination. When the children’s writing includes recognizable letters, refer to the letters by name.

How Else?

- √ You can repeat the activity for various occasions, for instance, to create thank you cards, birthday cards, get well cards, hello cards, invitations and so on. You can also vary the paper, envelopes and writing tools.



Written Language

Children use writing as a means of expression/communication.

Write a Message

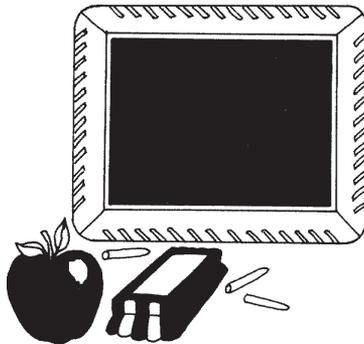
This activity helps children connect sounds to letters they use to stand for words.

Materials: Magnetic letters, metal trays such as cookie sheets or small cake pans

In groups of 3 to 5 children, give every child a metal tray and a set of 13-26 magnetic letters. Ask each child to write a message using the magnetic letters on the tray. After children finish writing their messages, ask each child to show their message to the others and read it out loud. When children use letters to stand for whole words, comment on the sound the letter makes in the words.

How Else?

- √ Post a chart that shows the letters of the alphabet and use dry-erase boards and markers or magic slates.
- √ Use letter stickers and paper or card stock.



Written Language

Children use writing as a means of expression/communication.

Restaurant

Writing serves many purposes. This activity helps children learn about writing as a means of keeping track of information and sharing it with others.

Create a restaurant in your housekeeping area by setting the table and turning the appliances around to face away from the table (this will establish a separate kitchen area).



Make simple picture menus, which show 3 to 5 food and drink items, such as juice, an apple, a carrot, raisins, and nuts. Let children take turns in the role of waiter/waitress, cook and restaurant visitor. Encourage the waiters and waitresses to write down the individual orders for the cooks to prepare.

Knowledge of Print and Books

Children apply early reading skills.

Environmental Print Display

Long before children can “read” books, they can say what different text in their environment means, such as stop signs and McDonalds arches. As part of a full group activity, ask parents to help their children select an item from home that they can “read”, such as an empty cereal box, toothpaste tube, or bread wrapper. Display these items for all of the children to see and “read”.

How Else?

- √ Post common roads signs, store signs (Wal-Mart) and restaurant signs (Hardee’s) for the children to see and “read”.
- √ Post breakfast, lunch, and snack menus for the day using pictures.



Knowledge of Print and Books

Children apply early reading skills.

Three-Dimensional Letters

This activity helps children identify letters using three-dimensional letters.

Materials: Three-dimensional letters (made of plastic, wood, wire, metal, sandstone or popsicle sticks), bags or baskets.

Give each child a bag or basket with 12 or more three-dimensional letters in it. Ask the children to do whatever they want to do with the letters. For example, they could sort, arrange, or talk about the letters. As the children are working with the letters, watch, listen and talk with individual children about what they are doing. Make note of the letters each child uses and use the letter names as part of the conversation.

How Else?

- √ Give the children a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar letters. Watch how the children explore their letters and talk with individual children about how they are using their letters.
- √ Give the children sets of letters including all the letters in their names and a card with their names written on. The letters on the card should be the size of the three-dimensional letters. Talk with individual children about their play with the letters.

c a t

Knowledge of Print and Books

Children apply early reading skills.

Letter Search

This activity encourages children to identify letters and to sort and arrange letters.

Materials: Letter blocks and tiles or letter cards.

With groups of 4 to 5 children, put a large collection of letter blocks and tiles in the middle of the circle where all the children can easily see and reach. Ask the children to find certain kinds of letters. For example, ask them to find their favorite letter; two of the same letters; a letter in their names; two letters that go together (any reason the child provides is reasonable). Converse with children about the letters they choose and refer to the letters by name.



Knowledge of Print and Books

Children apply early reading skills.

Word Train

This advanced activity allows children to sound out letter strings and combinations.

Materials: Letter blocks and cardboard pieces to be used as the train track.

With small groups of children, distribute 4 or 5 letter blocks and a piece of cardboard to each child. Ask the children to create their own “word train” on the cardboard with the blocks. Talk with each child, point to each letter block in order and sound out the child’s train.

How Else?

- √ Give each child a small set of letter blocks that includes a consonant pair and a vowel pair, for example, two *D*'s and two *A*'s
- √ Give each child the letters in his or her name. If the child arranges the letters in his or her name order, you might say “your train says /d//e//v//ò//n/, **Devon**.” If the child arranges the letters in another order, sound out the word the child created.

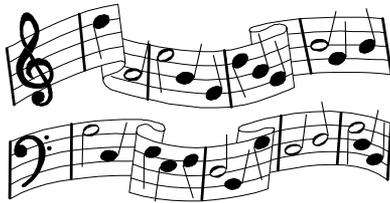


Sounds of Language

Children attend to sounds in language.



The next activities are designed to develop children's awareness of the sounds of language. This includes *rhymes* (word endings that sound the same) and *alliteration* (word beginnings that sound the same). Research shows a strong relationship between children's understanding of the sounds of language and children's early literacy and readiness to read.



Sounds of Language

Children attend to sounds in language.



Rhyme Awareness

Use this poem with the activity on the next page.

Ten Little Bluebirds

(Mother Goose, Gyo Fujikawa, Illustrator, 1968)

Ten little bluebirds, perched on a pine;
One flew away and then there were nine.

Nine little bluebirds, sitting up late;
One flew away and then there were eight.

Eight little bluebirds, looking up to heaven;
One flew away and then there were seven.

Seven little bluebirds, picking up sticks;
One flew away and then there were six.

Six little bluebirds, glad to be alive;
One flew away and then there were five.

Five little bluebirds, sitting on a door;
One flew away and then there were four.

Four little bluebirds, singing merrily;
One flew away and then there were three.

Three little bluebirds, hidden in a shoe;
One flew away and then there were two.

Two little bluebirds, pecking at a crumb;
One flew away and then there was one.

One little bluebird, chirping in the sun;
It flew away and then there were none.

Sounds of Language

Children attend to sounds in language.

Finding Rhymes

This activity helps children understand and identify rhyming words.

Materials: Rhyme and poem collections, rhyming stories, rhyming songs and fingerplays.

When reading or reciting rhymes and rhyming stories, pause to identify words that rhyme. Use the word *rhyme* to describe the common ending sounds.

Example: When you recite the poem “Ten Little Bluebirds”, after the first two sentences, stop to identify the rhyming words “pine” and “nine” by saying “Do you know what? Pine and nine sound alike. They both end with the sound **-ine**. Pine and nine rhyme!”.

How Else?

- √ When children are familiar with the rhymes, or rhyming stories, ask them to identify the rhymes as you read.

Example: When reciting the poem “Ten Little Bluebirds,” after the first two sentences, ask the children to identify the rhyming words. “I think there were two words that rhyme, can anyone tell me which words rhyme?”

Sounds of Language

Children attend to sounds in language.

Name-and-Word

This activity reinforces knowledge of rhyming words.

During transitions, provide a series of word pairs in which the child's name is always the same. Ask children to act on the word pair that rhymes.

Example: You might say " You can go get your coat when you hear a word that rhymes with your name. I might trick you, so watch out! Let's start with Sam. Hat, Sam. (Pause) Sun, Sam. (Pause) *Jam, Sam.*"

How Else?

- √ When children are familiar with this activity, ask them to generate rhyming and non-rhyming words for the group.

Kate

Coat

Kate

Book

Kate

Plate

Kate

Sounds of Language

Children attend to sounds in language.

Rhyming Names

This activity further reinforces knowledge of rhyming words.

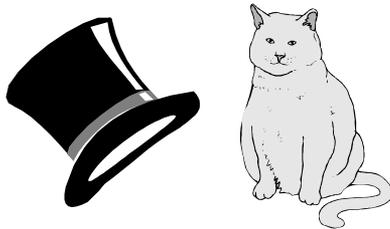
Materials: Sets of familiar objects and toys, including objects with rhyming names.

Put one item in a bag/basket for each child and the rest where children can see and reach. Ask children to find something whose name rhymes with the item in their bag/basket. Have each child show and talk about the rhyming items he or she found.

Examples: cat, hat; block, sock; pan, can

How Else?

- √ After children are familiar with this activity, put two items in their bags/baskets and ask them to find rhyming objects for each item.
- √ Give each child an object and ask them to search anywhere in the room for another object with a rhyming name and bring it back to the small group.



Sounds of Language

Children attend to sounds in language.

Alliterative Phrases in Stories, Rhymes and Songs

This activity familiarizes children with alliterative phrases and helps them identify alliterative phrases.

Materials: Books that include alliteration (see “Book Ideas”)

Regularly read stories and rhymes that include alliterative phrases. As you talk to children, use alliterative phrases and use familiar alliterative phrases during various activities.

How Else?

- √ When reading or reciting stories or rhymes, emphasize the common starts of the alliterative phrases. Use the word *alliteration* to describe their common starting sounds.

Book Ideas

Alligators All Around: An Alphabet by Maurice Sendak

My Very First Mother Goose by Iona Archibald Opie and Rosemary Wells (illustrator)

Sheep On A Ship by Nancy E. Shaw and Margot Apple (illustrator)

Sounds of Language

Children attend to sounds in language.

Name-Based Alliterations

This activity reinforces alliteration knowledge in children.

During transitions, ask children to listen carefully for an alliterative phrase and then do the next thing in the daily routine.

Example: You might say “You can all get up and go to the play ground when you hear an alliterative phrase! red, chair (pause); yellow, box (pause); brown, box!”

How Else?

- √ Use words that alliterate with children’s names.

Example: You might say “you can get a book to read or a toy to play with when you hear a word that alliterates with your name. Let’s start with Amy; doll, Amy (pause); hat, Amy (pause); apple, Amy!”

Riley

orange

Riley

yellow

Riley

red

Riley

Sounds of Language

Children attend to sounds in language.

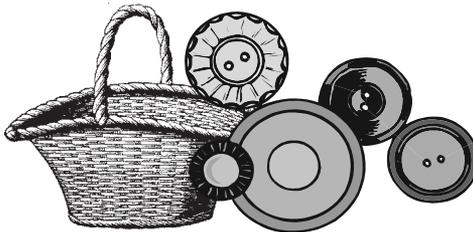
Alliterative “I Spy”

This advanced activity reinforces alliteration knowledge in children.

Play this activity by saying, “I see something that starts with the /b/ sound.” Wait for the children to offer an answer, for instance, they might offer basket, then you can say, “Can you think of any other word that starts with the /b/ sound like basket?”

How Else?

- √ This activity can take place during snack time or meal time.
- √ This activity can also be used during clean up time. You might say “Let’s start putting away all things that start with the /b/ sound first.” and so on.



Resources

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