

More Than Bulletin Boards: How to Build a Dynamic, Engaging Classroom Environment That Encourages Innovation and Collaboration!

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Ideas for Literacy Centers and Exploration Stations

- **Letter Detectives**
Save samples of environmental print, such as the front of cereal boxes, fast food bags, wrappers, etc. When you are introducing the “letter of the week”, have students use magnifying glasses and highlighters to mark that letter.
- **Alphabet Friends and Blends**
Using a large set of alphabet cards, brainstorm with students a movement they could do to help them remember each letter’s sound. You can create movements for blends (sh, th, ch, wh) and sight words, too.
- **Art Table Ideas**
Create an art wall with your students’ creations. Add sight word sentences to complete your art wall. Encourage students to use resource books, such as **6 Sticks** (by Molly Coxe), and **Just How Long Can a Long String Be?** (by Keith Baker) to aid them in creating art. Be sure to supply them with materials suggested by the books (popsicle sticks and string), enough workspace, and enough time to develop their ideas. Allow students who need more time to finish, or just want more time to elaborate on their creations, to continue working on them the next day.
- **Science Table Explorations**
Have a collection of objects available to explore at a science table. Some ideas are: stretchy tubes to join together and marbles, clear acrylic music boxes with hand cranks, paper towel tubes to use as “telescopes”, “icky things” (e.g., a moldy apple slice in a sealed bag), slinkys, squishy balls, magnetic objects, etc. Provide tools (e.g, magnifying glasses, magnets), resource books, and science journals to record observations. Change items periodically.

Ideas for Interactive Bulletin Boards

- **“The Cookie Man!”** After reading *The Gingerbread Man* (any version you like), students can help you make a gingerbread man, or “cookie man” from sugar cookie dough. Take him home to bake, then bring him back the next day for the students to see. Be sure to add “evidence” to him that wasn’t there before (e.g., a hat, balloons, a key, a bandaid to cover his missing button, etc.). Discuss what adventures he might have had while we were gone, based on the evidence. Have students look, draw, and write about him, and make a big book or wall story about his adventures. You can also create the Cookie Man on a chart, and label his parts/attributes. If you use removable labels, students can attach them where they go, and repeat this activity as desired.
- **Mr. Window, Mr. Hide-it, and Mr. Mix-it-up**
Use these “characters” to have a little fun with shared reading!
- **What Can You Do With a Piece of Paper?**
Try giving students a piece of plain white paper to play with- and see what ideas they come up with. The sky’s the limit! Observe and talk about what students are making, and their thought processes. What shapes, designs, sizes, and functions do their creations have? Compare and contrast! You can also have them draw and write about their creations, or glue them to a paper, write about them, and put them up on a bulletin board or art wall for shared reading. This is a great “easy prep” center idea, or it can be done whole group.
- **Alphabet Walls, Sight Word Walls, and Number Walls**
Provide students with a variety of art materials (such as recycled materials, odds-and-ends “stuff”, foil, macaroni, beans, Do-a-Dot markers, etc.) and encourage them to create alphabet letters, sight words, word families, and numbers to put up as part of our print-rich environment. This is a great alternative to using commercially prepared charts!

Ideas for Team Building

- **Community Circle With a Science Inquiry Twist**
Have students sit in a circle, and take turns passing around a squishy ball (or other interesting object). Give students the option of sharing anything that’s on their minds, or exploring the ball, using their 5 senses. As we explore the object, we can comment on shapes, sizes, colors, textures, functions, or anything else we notice. Great for oral language development and observation skills!