

Teach Reading Skills and Meet Common Core Standards Through Purposeful Play

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Playing with...The Alphabetic Principle

- **Letter Friends and Blends**

Using a large set of alphabet cards (such as those from your reading series), brainstorm with children a variety of movements they could do to help them remember each letter's sound. Try creating movements for blends (sh, th, ch, wh) and sight words, too.

- **Bounce and Roll Vowels**

Bounce a ball as you say the short vowel sounds, and roll the ball as you say the long vowel sounds.

- **Ideas for Letter Formation**

Try the "Letter Snake"; forming letters with your body (working in pairs or individually); writing letters in shaving cream, gel, sand, pudding, salt, or cornmeal; using toys to form letters (e.g., Lincoln Logs, K'Nex, or Legos), or writing letters in the air with your "magic writing finger".

- **ABC, Play With Me!**

Provide a variety of materials for children to freely explore, such as: toilet paper or paper towel tubes, and anything that has straight or curved properties. Ask children to use the materials to create any alphabet letter you're working on. Discuss the shape of the letter (upper and lower case) and its properties. Does it have curved parts? Straight parts? Tall or short parts? What materials work best to make that letter? Try using these letters to make an alphabet wall, or create sight words, too.

- **Snap and Stretch Vowels**

Give each child a large, wide rubber band to freely explore. Experiment with stretching the rubber band in a slow, sustained motion, and snapping it with quick, short movements. Note that long vowel sounds s-t-r-e-t-c-h like the rubber band, and that short vowel sounds are short, like a quick snap of the rubber band. Try each vowel sound while stretching or snapping the rubber band.

Playing with...Phonemic Awareness, Decoding, and Word Recognition

- **Word Squats and Slinky Sound-Outs**

For Word Squats: Pretend to "grab a word in the air", squat down, and hold onto the "word" in your fist. Slowly stretch and say the word as you rise to a standing position. "Stretch" the "word" apart with your hands as you rise up. As you say the word together, everyone drops down to a squatting position again. For Slinky Sound-Outs: Squat down, with a Slinky on the ground in front of you. As you "stretch" a word, slowly stretch the slinky as you rise to a standing position. Then, say the word and squat back down quickly, letting the slinky return to its original position. Brainstorm with children a variety of ways to stretch words, using their bodies, and/or the slinkys.

- **Rubber Band Words**

Try writing any cvc word on a large, wide rubber band. As you stretch the rubber band, watch how the written word actually stretches, too. A great visual representation for sounding out words!

- **Word Stretchers**
Clip an alphabet letter card to each of 3 children, forming a CVC word. Ask children to hold hands and stand close together. Ask 1 child to stand on either side of the “word” and be the “word stretcher”. As children sound out the word, the “word stretchers” gently pull the “word” apart, and put it back together. Onlookers can stretch the word too, by doing Word Squats (see above). Try Word Stretchers with longer words, too, or with children’s names.
- **Onset and Rime Jump**
Like Word Stretchers, but this time one person has the onset of the word clipped to him, and the second person has the rime. Starting from opposite ends of the room, everyone says the onset (as that person makes a “bunny jump” towards the rime), and then the rime (as that person makes a “bunny jump” towards the onset). When they meet, they jump together as we repeat the word.
- **Syllable Stomps**
Like Onset and Rime Jump, but this time use syllables.
- **Little Words to Big Words**
Also like Onset and Rime Jump, but this time use parts of compound words (e.g., “skate” and “board” to make “skateboard”).
- **Sentence Magician**
Ask children to hold word cards, which will be used to create a sentence. A “Sentence Magician” touches each word that will be needed for the sentence, and those children will stand with their words in the front of the group, forming the sentence. When each word in the sentence is in place, with proper spacing, we read the sentence together as the “Sentence Magician” tracks the print.
- **Onset and Rime Playdough Squishers**
Ask children to form a small sphere of playdough for the onset, and a larger sphere to represent the rime. For example, if you use the word, **cat**, the small sphere represents the /c/, and the larger sphere represents the /at/. Holding the small sphere in the left hand, and the larger sphere in the right hand, have the group say the sounds, “/c/, /at/, **cat**”. When they say /c/, have them bring their left hand towards their right hand, and when they say /at/, have them bring their right hand towards their left until both hands meet in the middle. Have them say **cat**, and squish both spheres together. Try adding letter tiles, placing the tile for “c” on the small sphere, and the letters “a” and “t” on the rime sphere.
- **Bounce and Roll Words**
Bounce a ball for each syllable in a word as you say the word. For example, bounce a ball twice, once for each syllable, as you say “play-ground”. Try rolling a ball as you slowly say and stretch the word, as in “p-l-a-y-g-r-o-u-n-d”.
- **Silent /e/, Freeze With Me!**
This is the same idea as in the above activity, “Letter Friends and Blends Meet Sound-Out Words”. This time, use 4 letter words ending in silent /e/. For example, in the word, “rake”, perform the letter sound movements for each letter, but when you get to the silent /e/, FREEZE!
- **Jump and Track Sentences**
Choose a sentence that has sight words, or a pattern you’re working on. Use sidewalk chalk to write each word of the sentence on the blacktop outside. Draw a square or rectangle around each word. Have children take turns jumping either inside each square, or underneath it as they jump and track the print, and read the sentence.
- **Mr. Window, Mr. Hide-it, and Mr. Mix-it-up**
Use these “characters” to have a little fun with shared reading!

Playing with... Vocabulary and Concept Development

- **What Can You Do With a Piece of Paper or a Box?**
Give each child a sheet of paper (any kind). Encourage them to create something with it, and to talk about what they're making. What shapes, designs, sizes, and functions do their creations have? Compare and contrast! Encourage children to 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. Variation: Try this activity with small boxes. Give each child a shoebox or other smaller box. Encourage them to turn their box into something, or combine boxes to create a structure.
- **What Can You Do With a Pipecleaner?** Give children 1-3 pipecleaners to explore, either by themselves or with a partner. Ask children to make one creation to write about and take home, and make another one to put up on a word web or chart story in the classroom. Help children to tape their creation to a writing paper, look and draw it, and write about it.
- **Be the Word!**
Ask children to slowly stretch out a word, saying the sounds in the word. As they stretch out the word, ask them to slowly get into an action pose that relates to that word. For example, if the word is **cat**, children can slowly raise their claws and get in a position that shows they are ready to pounce on their prey (a mouse). As soon as children have finished stretching out the word and have completed their pose, ask them to freeze. Ask children to say the target word. That becomes the signal for everyone to "unfreeze" and pantomime actions to show the word's meaning. Try other words, as time permits.
- **Guess the Connection!** Try this activity from the Disney Imagineers. Pick any two unrelated objects and try to find a connection between them. For example, a block and a piece of paper could represent a genie riding on a magic carpet! A pencil and a crayon held together at an angle could represent a capital L. Ask children to look, draw, and write about their connections.
- **Literacy- Enriched Play Centers: Art Table Ideas**
Create an art wall with your children's creations. Add sight word sentences to complete your art wall. Encourage children 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 children who need more time to finish, or just want more time to elaborate on their creations, to continue working on them the next day.

Playing with... Read Alouds

The Gingerbread Man

Our “What if?/I wonder?” Question: Where has our gingerbread man been, and what’s his story, based on the evidence?

Activity: After reading the story, make a “cookie man”, either from gingerbread dough, or sugar cookie dough. Use M & M’s to create a face and buttons. After baking, let him cool and plan to eat him the next day. The teacher, in the meantime, adds things such as a little cap, play soda bottle and balloons, etc., takes off a button, and adds a Band-aid. The next day lead children to notice this “evidence” on him that wasn’t there before. Based on the evidence, piece together his “story”, and compile ideas for a class big book.

Extension Activity: Could he really “melt” if he fell in the water? Make predictions, and estimate how long he could be in water before he dissolves. Give each child a mini gingerbread man cookie, a cup of water, and let the observations begin!

Alphabatics By Suse MacDonald

Our “What if?/I wonder?” Question: What shapes do we see in our alphabet letters? If we play with letters, what pictures can we create?

Activity: Ask children to make letters with their bodies, either individually, with a partner, or in a small group. Talk about the lines, curves, and shapes of letters. Discuss observations. (For example, an “M” might look like mountains, an “O” might look like a hula hoop, or a “Z” like a zig-zag.) Provide die cut letters and encourage children to make pictures with them, or ask them to draw letters, and make them into something. Encourage children to play with and explore ideas together, and then share their pictures with the group when everyone is finished.

Q is For Duck By Mary Elting and Michael Folsom

Our “What if?/I wonder?” Question: What alphabet riddles can we create, using the example featured in the book?

Activity: Help children to create their own alphabet riddles, as part of independent writing. Give them the sentence pattern in the story as a writing prompt: “___ is for ___. Why? Because...”. Or, work as a group to create an alphabet riddle for each letter, and create a class big book or wall story. Ask children to draw the pictures, and then assist them in writing the sentence for each page you create together. The big book or wall story becomes a great opportunity for shared reading!

What Shall We Play? By Sue Heap

Our “What if?/I wonder?” Question: What can I be? What can you be?

Activity: After reading, ask children to suggest something for everyone to be, such as a car. Then, ask everyone to pantomime the action of a car. For example, someone could be a “bumpy car”, a “fast car”, an “old car”. On a chart, list each different kind of car that the group suggests, and as you point to the words, ask the children to pantomime. Note how many different ways children can pretend to be one thing!

Student and Teacher Resources

Building Center Books

- **Not a Box** by Antoinette Portis
- **The Do Nothing Machine** by Sharon MacDonald
- **Jack the Builder** by Stuart J. Murphy and Michael Rex
- **Rollercoaster** by Marla Frazee
- **Building a House** by Byron Barton
- **Block City** by Robert Louis Stevenson
- **Tinkertoy Building Manual: Graphic Instructions for 37 World-Famous Designs** by Dylan Dawson and Robert Steimle
- **Lincoln Logs Building Manual: Graphic Instructions for 37 World-Famous Designs** by Dylan Dawson and Robert Steimle
- **The Lego Ideas Book** by Daniel Lipkowitz
- **Lego City Brickmaster (With 9 Lego Models)** by DK Publishing

Art Center Books

- **Look What You Can Make With Boxes** by Lorianne Siomades and Hank Schneider
- **Look What You Can Make With Egg Cartons** by Betsy Ochester and Hank Schneider
- **Look What You Can Make With Tubes** by Margie Hayes Richmond and Hank Schneider
- **Look What You Can Make With Paper Plates** by Margie Hayes Richmond and Hank Schneider
- **Look What You Can Make With Paper Bags** by Judy Burke and Hank Schneider
- **Look What You Can Make With Newspapers, Magazines, and Greeting Cards** by Kathy Ross
- **What Can You Do With a Paper Bag?** by Judith Cressy

Science Center Books

- **What is a Scientist?** by Barbara Lehn
- **Science Tools** by J.A. Randolph
- **I Use Science Tools** by Kelli Hicks

Teacher Resources

- Bowden, S. (2005) **Literacy All the Livelong Day: A Picture Portfolio of Kindergarten Teaching and Learning.** Language Arts, 82, 4, 278.
- Bronson, P. & Merryman, A. (2010) **The Creativity Crisis.** Newsweek, July 10th issue.
- Disney Imagineers (2003). **The Imagineering Way: Ideas to Ignite Your Creativity.**
- Elkind, D. (2007). **The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally.**
- Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, R. (2003). **Einstein Never Used Flashcards: How Our Children Really Learn- and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less.**
- Jacobs, G., & Crowley, K. (2010) **Reaching Standards and Beyond in Kindergarten: Nurturing Children's Sense of Wonder and Joy in Learning.**
- Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2010). **Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School.** College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood.
- Pecaski McLennan, D. (2011) **Meeting Standards in the Changing Landscape of Today's Kindergarten.** Young Children, July, 2011, pp 106-111.
- Wasserman, S. (1992). **Serious Play in the Classroom: How Messing Around Can Win You the Nobel Prize.** Childhood Education, 68, 3, 133-139.

Common Core and Content Standards for Workshop Activities

Common Core Standards for Language Arts

Reading Standards for Literature

1. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
2. Retell stories, including details.
3. Identify characters, settings, major events.
7. Describe the relationship between illustrations and the story.
10. Activate prior knowledge, make predictions.

Reading Standards for Informational Text

1. Ask and answer questions about key details.
3. Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information.
7. Describe the relationship between illustrations and the text.
10. Activate prior knowledge, make predictions.

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills (Print Concepts)

1. Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills (Phonological Awareness)

2. Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills (Phonics and Word Recognition)

3. Know and apply grade level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills (Fluency)

4. Read emergent reader texts with purpose and understanding.

Writing Standards

7. Participate in shared research and writing projects.

Speaking and Listening

1. Participate in collaborative conversations.
6. Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

Language Standards

5. Explore word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.

Common Core Standards for Math

Mathematical Practices

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

Science Standards

Investigation and Experimentation

5. Students should develop their own questions and perform investigations.
 - 4a. Observe common objects using the five senses.
 - 4b. Describe the properties of common objects.
 - 4d. Compare and sort common objects by one physical attribute (e.g., color, Shape, texture, size, weight).
 - 4e. Communicate observations orally and through drawings.

Notes: