

WORD PLAY!

Creating Literacy-Rich Play at Home

compiled by Wendy Wilcox, Cornell Cooperative Extension

Children who are exposed to books and literacy play early and often will seek the pleasure of the print word in the world around them. By incorporating many print-rich activities into your child's play, the value and importance of words are introduced. Keep reading to discover some exciting word play activities!

Engage your child in literacy-rich pretend play.

Create different settings for pretend play in your home. Designate a special location in your home for these specialty play areas. Rotate the settings throughout the year. Some favorite ideas are a post office, library, doctor's office, or school. By incorporating many print-rich props into your child's make believe play areas, your child is gently introduced to the importance and value of the words around them. When gathering props for each of these locations, include many print-rich items; use the following list as a starting point in developing your settings.

Post Office

- Create a mailbox for your child and “deliver” junk mail into it regularly.
- Use shoeboxes to create a mail cubbies for sorting mail.
- Make a mailbag for your child to deliver mail and magazines to family members.
- Provide paper, envelopes, and boxes for your child to create letters and packages.
- Have your child create their own postage stamp.
- Supply your child with rubber stamps and stamp pads to “stamp” the mail.
- Check out relevant library books and keep them in this area – try *The Jolly Postman* by Allan Ahlberg, *Dear Mr. Blueberry* by Simon James, *Dear Peter Rabbit* and *Yours Truly, Goldilocks* by Alma Flor Ada.



Library

- Place an old key board (or make a pretend one with cardboard) at a “library” desk.
- Make a desk name plate and nametag for your “librarian.”
- Have your child design their own bookmarks and library cards.
- Help your child choose great books for reading aloud to stuffed animal “children.”
- Stock a bookshelf with favorite books for “checking out.”
- Make labels for the bookshelf so your child can categorize books – animals, friends, poetry.
- Help your child make a list of favorite books to pass out to friends and family.
- Help your child create a puppet show for children visiting the library.
- Read *Wild About Books* by Judy Sierra, *I.Q. Goes to the Library* by Mary Ann Fraser and *Beverly Billingsly Borrows a Book* by Alexander Stadler.

Doctor's Office

- Use a blank scrap pad as a pad for writing prescriptions.
- Use a calendar to make appointments for your patients.
- Provide a phone book and phone to use to contact patients and other doctors.
- Provide file folders with paper for patient records.
- Make a sign advertising “Doctor’s Office” and diplomas.
- Provide a clip board and paper for your doctor to take notes.
- Provide reading material for your doctor’s office – magazines, newspapers.
- Design x-rays for your patients.



School

- Stock your child’s school desk with paper, pencils, markers, glue, and scissors.
- Find an old chalkboard or wipe board for lessons.
- Provide a calendar for marking off each day of the week.
- Stock a bookshelf with books for using in school “lessons.”
- Post a world map for your child to explore.
- Make a magnetic board and include magnetic letters, words, and objects for storytelling and lessons.
- Look through magazines and cut out pictures of things that rhyme: bat, cat, frog, log. If you are unable to find pictures, draw them and hang them up on the wall.
- Check out *Froggy Goes to School* by Jonathan London, *If You Take a Mouse to School* by Laura Numeroff, *Miss Nelson is Missing* by Harry Allard, *Chrysanthemum* and *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes.



Museum

- Children can make pictures for an art museum, stones, leaves and acorns for a natural history museum, or gather interesting objects around the house to display.
- Children can set up their exhibit in their rooms or even on the dining room table.
- Objects will need descriptive signs that information about the artist or collector.
- Make signs announcing the museum opening with hours, location and directions.
- Find books with museum themes to the library, such as *Museum A,B,C's* by the Metropolitan Museum, or *The Art Lesson* by Tomie dePaola.

Contact your child's favorite authors

Write a letter or draw a picture for the author of your child’s treasured books. This will increase their understanding of how books work (picture books are created by an author who writes the words and an illustrator who draws the pictures). Your local library can help you locate their contact information. Who knows, you may receive a letter back!

Infuse your child's daily activities with reading and writing fun!

Take time to point out the many ways words help us throughout the day – read aloud from the cereal box, make a list of errands to run, read aloud the list of ingredients and steps for a recipe, and read aloud from the daily newspaper. These activities will demonstrate the role of the printed word in the

world around us. Children will begin to understand that words have value beyond the storybooks that you read aloud together. Try these activities to illustrate the value of the printed word:

- Create a pen pal who may be a friend and write notes and letters back and forth. Or, write a letter to a friend or family member who lives far away, maybe a grandma or an uncle or a cousin.
- For children who can not yet write, help them record their important thoughts on paper. Have your child make their own list, special story or letter. Write down their words on paper and reread them aloud to your child.
- Label elements of your home so your child can begin to make the connection between objects and their corresponding word.
- While taking a walk, make up rhyming words for objects you see (tree/me, car/star) Encourage your child to use his/her fingers to practice drawing letters or designs on plates or trays covered with “edible paint” such as whipped cream, pudding, or yogurt.
- Have your child practice their cutting by snipping coupons together. Make a grocery list and talk about the different items needed. Make a rebus grocery list with pictures and words so you child can “read” the grocery list while shopping.

Choose books that relate to your child’s interests

Keep a sheet of paper on the refrigerator and write down topics your child is interested in throughout the week. Was your child particularly enthralled when digging in the dirt outside? Has your child talked all week about the fire engine that passed your house? Write these down and take the sheet to the library during your weekly visits; have a librarian help you find books on these topics. Demonstrate how you can use books to find the answer to questions by searching for information on interesting subjects. Does your child wonder how birds fly or why leaves fall from the trees in fall? Find the answers to their questions in books.

Act out your child’s favorite stories

Use the plots from your child’s favorite stories as the basis for pretend play. Act out the stories as they are found in the book or change the ending. Some great stories to act out are *Froggy Gets Dressed* by Jonathan London, *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood, and *The Wolf’s Chicken Stew* by Keiko Kasza. Use puppets, dolls, stuffed animals or encourage your child to act out their own play for your family to watch.

Create a special reading nook

Creating a comfortable setting for reading conveys the importance of reading! Use blankets, pillows, tables, and chairs to create a reading fort. Make enough room for the entire family to snuggle down and read aloud together. Get creative in thinking of different places to read – a dry bathtub or under the bed with flashlights. Stumped about which books to choose? Refer to *The Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease for many wonderful suggestions!



Make an alphabet book

Write each letter of the alphabet at the top of a piece of paper. Using an old magazine or advertisements from the newspaper, cut out pictures of objects that start with each letter of the alphabet and paste them on the appropriate page. For extra writing fun, write out the words below the pictures. Now you have your own alphabet book! You can make a cover for it, punch holes in the sides of the paper and tie it all together with some yarn!

FOR OLDER KIDS:

Make Your Own Audio Book

Pick out several of your favorite picture books. Practice reading the books aloud and emphasizing the words with your voice. After practicing, read the stories aloud into a tape recorder (or use a microphone connected to your computer to create a CD). Loan the tape or CD and picture books to younger children in your neighborhood. Encourage them to listen to the tape while looking at the pictures in the book.

Make a progressive storybook

Create a story journal with your family and friends. Each person will contribute to the telling of this story. Start by introducing key elements: character, setting, point of view, conflict, theme, and plot. Once you have completed your introduction, pass the journal onto a family member or friend. This person will pick up the story where you left off, before passing the journal onto the next person who will continue the story. Each person should write four or five paragraphs before passing it along. Try to have at least five different people contribute to the story before returning it to you. Write an ending to the story. Once you finish, make copies for all the authors who contributed to the story.



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