



GROWING TOGETHER WITH BOOKS A GUIDE FOR LEADERS

A CREC Family Literacy Program



Statewide Family
Engagement Center

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What is Growing Together with Books?

Growing Together with Books is designed to provide families with resources to help foster children's early literacy development. Each session is facilitated by a group leader, focuses on a topic related to early literacy, and highlights specific children's books related to the topic.

Program Format

Growing Together with Books is a six-week series. Each session lasts about 90 minutes and includes time for optional refreshments, a review of the previous week, discussions and activities centered around the session topic, a model read-aloud and discussion of the session book, and the sharing of book lists and activities to try at home. Families meet without their children and childcare is provided whenever possible.

Target Audience

The program was designed for families with children from birth to 8 years of age. The program can be adapted for expectant parents and families with older children as well. Group size is typically between 10 and 20 family members.

Benefits to Families

Growing Together with Books provides families with opportunities to connect with other families, to share their experiences with early literacy, to explore new books and activities, and to learn about community and online resources. Families also receive a new paperback children's book at each session that they attend.

Family Commitment

Families are encouraged to read to their children for at least 15 to 20 minutes every day and to track their progress in their journals. Each family member is given a journal and is asked to record their own and their children's reactions to the literacy activities they try at home.





Program Philosophy

Growing Together with Books embraces a two-generation family literacy approach, recognizing the rich diversity of families in Connecticut. The selected books, session topics, and activities are designed to reflect the multiple identities of families (e.g., race, culture, language, sexual orientation) and create opportunities for both children and caregivers to learn together. This approach fosters meaningful connections among families while strengthening literacy skills across generations. Establishing an open, welcoming, and respectful community within the group is essential, with guidelines in place to support this from the first session and throughout the program.

Goals

- To encourage reading aloud, storytelling, and writing as a regular part of daily family routine.
- To help families understand their role in fostering an interest in reading and literacy skills in their children.
- To help family members learn more about reading to their children and how to choose books for their children.
- To provide opportunities for family members to interact through enjoyable literacy-related experiences.
- To build the capacity of families to understand school practices related to literacy and empower them to advocate for high-quality public education at the school and district levels.

Key Principles of Family Engagement

Families play a central role in children's learning and development. Research has shown that engaging and partnering with families can have positive impacts on children's social and emotional development and success in school.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), in collaboration with families, educators, policy makers, and community members, has developed the following definition of family engagement.

Family Engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among



families, educators and community partners to promote children's learning and development from birth through college and career. The purpose of Connecticut's common definition and framework of family engagement is to encourage shared understanding and collaboration among families and professionals in education and human service programs (CSDE, 2018).

In addition to the definition, CSDE provides a series of guiding principles for effective family engagement. Growing Together with Books is designed around this definition of family engagement and centers four of these guiding principles throughout the program.

Build collaborative, trusting relationships focused on learning.

Growing Together with Books prioritizes building relationships with and among families. Each session begins with time for families to connect and share their experiences with reading with their children and the at-home literacy activities. The first session focuses on creating a community within the group and a safe and collaborative learning environment.

Listen to what families say about their children's interests and challenges.

Families know their children, their likes and dislikes, strengths and challenges. Growing Together with Books respects and centers the diverse insights and knowledge that families bring to the program. A key part of each session is the discussion families have about the session topic and book, when they have opportunities to share their ideas and their experiences with their children.

Model high-quality learning practices.

During each Growing Together with Books session, the leader models reading aloud the session book and highlights one effective strategy for reading with children. These strategies are research-based and similar to strategies that are taught in preschool and elementary classrooms. The strategies include: rereading, reading with expression, making connections with the characters and the story, using pictures to support understanding the story, stopping and asking questions while you read, and retelling the story.

Support families to become effective leaders and advocates for children.

Throughout Growing Together with Books, families are encouraged to learn more about their children's literacy practices and the resources that can support early literacy development. Leaders help families make connections within their communities, such as the library, to



take advantage of programs, classes and other opportunities. These experiences and connections support families with advocating for children's literacy needs.

To learn more about Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families in Connecticut, please visit

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/publications/full-equal-and-equitable-partnerships-with-families/introduction>

Parts of the Program

Outline of Sessions

Session 1: Introduction to Growing Together with Books

Families get acquainted with each other and the program leader and learn what to expect from the sessions. The discussion and activities explore how children benefit from reading and sharing books.

Session Book: *How to Read to a Grandma or Grandpa* by Jean Reagan

Session 2: Rhythm and Rhyme

Families will experience the joys of rhythm and rhyme used in text, poetry and song. Family members will discuss how read-alouds with rhythm and rhyme support their children's development in literacy skills.

Session Book: *Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* by Jack Prelutsky

Session 3: Who Am I? Who Are You?

Families will explore how to support children in learning more about themselves and others. Families will reflect on identities, what they are and how they shape who we are and how we live.

Session Book: *Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean Myers

Session 4: Family Feelings

Families will explore why it is important to support children with expressing their feelings. Families will discuss how to model sharing and talking about feelings with their children. Children's picture books are a great way to begin these conversations.

Session Book: *Knuffle Bunny* by Mo Willems



Session 5: A Visit to the Library

Families will make a connection with the local library and explore what books, resources and services it has to offer. (*Note: Prior to the session, the leader will need to reach out to a local children's librarian to see if the group can visit the library and get a tour.)

Session Book: *A Library* by Nikki Giovanni

Session 6: The Reading-Writing Connection

Families will discuss the skills and understandings of beginning readers and writers. Families will learn that by reading and retelling stories, and encouraging their children to write, families can support their children to become stronger readers and writers. At the end of the session, families can share and celebrate all they have accomplished through the program.

Session Book: *Bunny Cakes* by Rosemary Wells

Session Books

At each session families are given a new, high-quality paperback book to keep. The same book is given to all families and the titles are included on the Outline of Sessions that will be distributed at the first meeting. Only families that attend a particular session receive the session book.

Books are selected based on quality, age-appropriateness, diversity of authors, characters and topics, and cost. The session books are usually paperbacks, though in groups with expectant mothers or parents of very young children, board books are also included.

Occasionally a family will indicate that they already have a copy of a particular title, and it is great if an alternative can be provided. In these cases, the family should be encouraged to also share the regular session book with their children during the coming week so that they can contribute to the next week's discussion.

Each session includes a model read-aloud and discussion of the session book. During the read-aloud, leaders model effective strategies for reading with children. Each session highlights one strategy that the leader can model and discuss with families. The read-aloud and discussion support families with making reading aloud a fun and interactive activity with their children.

It is important to emphasize that families should read the current session book to their children several times during the coming week.



Families will share about these experiences reading with their children during the opening discussion at the following session.

Book Lists

Included in each session are lists of books related to the session topic with a short description of each book. In some sessions, leaders are asked to bring copies of these books from the library for families to look at and use during the session. These lists should be shared with families at the end of the session along with the Family Activities to Try at Home.

Family Journals

Each family member who participates in Growing Together with Books is given a blank journal at the first session. The journals are a place for families to keep notes on the time they spend with their children reading or engaged in literacy-related activities. We suggest that they record what books they read, how the children reacted to the books, and any changes they notice in the children's interest in books.

Families can also keep audio, video or photographic journals if they prefer, to capture the literacy activities they engage in with their children. This could be voice memos, short videos, or a series of photographs on their phone. The journal can become a keepsake for families, capturing moments of early literacy with their children. Journal writing is a choice and while families can be encouraged to record in them, no one should be forced to write in or read from their journal.

To further encourage families to use their journals, group leaders might try writing one question on a post-it note for families to put in their journals to address for the next week. There are suggested questions at the end of each session.

Family Activities to Try at Home

Each session of Growing Together with Books includes Family Activities to Try at Home. These are designed to be fun, age-appropriate, easy activities that extend the topic and focus of the session. The activities page should be copied and shared with families at the end of each session.



Leaders might suggest a specific activity for families to try before the next session. Leaders could also ask families to choose one, write about it in their journals and share about the experience at the beginning of the next session.

These activities encourage families to continue the reading and literacy activities from the group sessions at the home during the week. Reading with children is extremely valuable and the discussion, exploration and projects that can happen around books can become equally important and enjoyable.

Leading Growing Together with Books

What is a Leader?

A leader for Growing Together with Books is the organizer for the group, setting dates and a place to meet, and bringing optional refreshments and all the necessary materials. The leader is also the group facilitator who engages families in open, interactive discussions and encourages participation by all families.

Below are some suggestions for ways to prepare for the sessions and to facilitate positive and engaging discussions.

Before the Group Begins

- Before the first session, select and visit the location where the group will meet and/or talk with the contact person about the exact meeting place for the sessions. The location should be a separate room or space that it is free from distractions and interruptions. The location will need to be large enough to comfortably fit all family members and materials.

Planning for Sessions

- Review the upcoming session Goals and Overview.
- Gather the necessary materials listed in Materials Needed.
- Select a couple of questions you will use to facilitate the Recap of Last Week.



- Review the talking points for Topic Talk and decide how you will share the information and what questions you will ask the group to encourage discussion.
- Look through the materials needed for the Session Activity and try out the activity yourself.
- Practice reading the Session Book using the suggested read-aloud strategy for the week.
- Review the slides provided for each session and decide whether you will use them and if you need to customize them.
- Arrange for refreshments for the session.

Preparing the Space

- Make sure you have all the Materials Needed for the session.
- Arrive in plenty of time to set up before families arrive. Make sure you will have access to the space.
- Create a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere.
- Arrange the space so that everyone will be comfortable and will be able to see and talk with each other. A large table with chairs around it works well. Leave room in the space so that families can enter and exit easily.
- Have refreshments available in an accessible location.
- Have all the books and materials that you will be using displayed and/or organized before families arrive.
- Welcome and greet families. Share with the group where the restrooms are, where they can put their coats and personal items, and where the refreshments are located.

During Each Session

- Begin and end sessions on time.
- Remind the group of the group agreements created during the first session.



- Encourage everyone to participate in ways they feel comfortable. Try to keep one or two people from dominating the discussion. The discussion should be a space to talk about the session topic and a space where people feel safe sharing about their own experiences.
- In order to keep the discussion going and encourage participation by all families, the leader can:
 - Ask follow-up questions;
 - Share related personal experiences;
 - Engage a family member that has not had a chance to speak or ask if anyone who has not had a chance to share would like to; and
 - Restate observations or comments of group members to highlight important points and validate family contributions.

Resources for Leaders

Read-Aloud Strategies

Each session of Growing Together with Books highlights one read-aloud strategy. These strategies are research-based and parallel strategies that are taught in preschool and elementary classrooms. It is important to model these strategies for families. There are tips on how to model the strategies in the Session Book Read-Aloud section for each session.

Below are bookmarks for each strategy that can be copied and shared with families along with the Session Book at the end of each session. If it is possible to copy the bookmarks on card stock and/or to laminate them, this will help them to last longer for families.

1. **Reread** – Read the same book multiple times with your child. Rereading your child’s favorite books helps them build confidence as a reader.
2. **Make the story come alive** – Change your voice as you read aloud to show the mood of the book (silly, mysterious, adventurous) and how characters are feeling (sad, happy, excited, angry, curious).



3. **Look at and talk about the pictures** – Use the pictures to help you and your child understand what is happening in the book.
4. **Make connections** – As you read, make connections to your life, another book or what is happening around you in your community or the world. Ask your child about the connections they make with the book.
5. **Stop and wonder** – Stop every so often while reading and share what you are thinking, noticing or wondering about the book, the characters, and what is happening in the story.
6. **Retell the story** – After reading the story retell what happened in the story and ask your child to join you. What happened first, second, last? What was the most important part? Who were the characters? What part did you like the best?

Early Literacy Development

Included here are links to several resources with information about early literacy development. They may be helpful to review before beginning the group to learn more about literacy at different ages and ways families can support their children's literacy development. These resources can also be shared with families who are looking for more information around early literacy.

Reach Out and Read Milestones of Early Development

Reach Out and Read partners with doctors across the US to promote early literacy and healthy relationships. Their Milestones of Early Literacy Development Chart describes what children are doing, saying, and learning from 6 months through 5 years old, as well as what families can do at each of these stages to support literacy development.

<https://reachoutandread.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ROR-Milestones-of-Early-Development-Chart.pdf>

University of Florida Literacy Institute

The University of Florida Literacy Institute has many resources for families and educators. The Parent Hub has a collection of links to sites for more information on early literacy and literacy activities for children. The Institute's Developmental Milestones for Language and Literacy is a guide for families that describes early literacy development at each stage from birth to age 5.



<https://ufl.education.ufl.edu/resources/parent/birth-to-pre-k/developmental-milestones/>

How to Raise a Reader

This guide shares how families can support their children to become readers across ages, describes the types of books children become interested in at different ages, and provides book suggestions and family literacy activities to promote a love of reading.

<https://www.nytimes.com/article/how-to-raise-a-reader.html>

Everyday Steps to Reading and Writing

This article from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) highlights how families can support their child in literacy during the preschool years.

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/everyday-steps-reading-and-writing>

Reading and Writing Using Digital Tools

Though Growing Together with Books focuses on the use of traditional print books, it is important to recognize that many families may be using e-books and other digital tools to support their children's literacy. While there are many benefits to using electronic devices for reading and writing, educators and families should understand when and how to use them. A few recommendations and resources are listed below.

E-books and Children: 2-8 years

This article from the Australian parenting website [RaisingChildren.net.au](https://raisingchildren.net.au) provides recommendations and tips for selecting and using e-books with children.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/ebooks-and-children-2-8-years>

E-Books vs. Print: What Parents Need to Know

Scholastic, Inc. shares the pros and cons of both e-books and print books. These guidelines may help families determine when a particular format is appropriate.

<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading/reading-resources/developing-reading-skills/e-books-vs-print-what-parents-need-to-know.html>

Recommendations for Using Digital Tools for Writing with Children (Gemini AI Overview, 1/2/25)

When teaching young children to write digitally, prioritize age-



appropriate apps with simple interfaces, focus on interactive elements like drawing and coloring, incorporate storytelling activities, and ensure ample guidance on proper digital pen control to support fine motor skills development while fostering creativity and engagement; always monitor screen time and prioritize hands-on learning alongside digital practice.

Reimagining Writing Instruction with Digital Tools

Written with teachers in mind, this article from the International Literacy Association emphasizes that instructional goals should determine which digital tools are used. Examples of instructional goals and corresponding tools are provided.

<https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2016/07/01/reimagining-writing-instruction-with-digital-tools>

Reading Aloud with Multilingual Families

The strategies that are shared in Growing Together with Books can be used with children and families that speak languages other than English. Research shows that reading aloud in the home language leads to better comprehension, vocabulary, cultural connections, and increased motivation for multilingual learners. The use of translanguaging – a way of using multiple languages to communicate – allows children and their families to use all that they know about language to communicate and learn. Below are resources that provide additional information.

Reading 101 for English Language Learners

This article from Reading Rockets provides an overview of ways to support the reading development of multilingual learners and contains a section on the use of students' home languages.

<https://www.readingrockets.org/helping-all-readers/english-language-learners/reading-101-ells>

The Home Language: An English Language Learner's Most Valuable Resource

In addition to providing information about the research that supports the importance of students' home languages, this article provides information about policies that shaped educational practices for multilingual learners.

<https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/home-language-english-language-learners-most-valuable-resource>



Why Reading To Your Kids In Your Home Language Will Help Them Become Better Readers

The ¡Colorín colorado! website provides many resources for educators and families of multilingual learners. This article for families shares the research behind the benefits of reading in the home language.

<https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/why-reading-your-kids-your-home-language-will-help-them-become-better-readers>

Translanguaging: Teaching at the Intersection of Language and Social Justice

This focus bulletin from the WIDA at the University of Wisconsin-Madison defines translanguaging, provides examples, and offers questions for reflection.

<https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Focus-Bulletin-Translanguaging.pdf>

Nonfiction Read-Alouds

Group leaders may want to mention to families that while most of the books in Growing Together with Books are fiction, reading nonfiction is just as important in developing early literacy skills. The read-aloud strategies shared in the six sessions will work for nonfiction books, but some may require a little tweaking, depending on the book. Here are a few resources with information about reading nonfiction books.

The Benefits of Nonfiction Books for Kids

Scholastic highlights the benefits of reading nonfiction books to children and shares tips for selecting books and reading them out loud.

<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading/raise-a-reader-blog/nonfiction-books-kids.html>

Making Time for Nonfiction Read-Alouds

Teachers often pick nonfiction books because the topic is connected to the grade level curriculum, but there are other reasons for choosing nonfiction books. Different types of nonfiction books and their summaries are highlighted in this article.

<https://choiceliteracy.com/article/making-time-for-nonfiction-read-alouds/>

Position Statement on the Role of Nonfiction Literature (K–12)

This position statement from the National Council of Teachers of



English (NCTE) provides a comprehensive rationale for using nonfiction to support the reading and writing lives of students. In addition to providing research about the benefits of the use of nonfiction, the position statement gives recommendations on how to incorporate nonfiction into the teaching of reading, writing, research processes, visual literacy, and critical literacies.

<https://ncte.org/statement/role-of-nonfiction-literature-k-12/>

Impacts of COVID on Early Literacy and Family Engagement

The COVID-19 pandemic had significant and lasting impacts on families across the state of Connecticut and throughout the United States. The ways that young children and their caregivers experienced and lived through the pandemic depended on many factors including age, race, language practices, socioeconomic status and location. With the emergency closures of schools and daycare facilities, more demands were placed on families and they reported feeling spread thin and unable to meet the needs of their jobs, caregiving, and teaching their children (Timmons et al., 2021). During the pandemic, there was an increase in technology reading to children at home, which resulted in fewer adults regularly reading with children (Read et al., 2022). Because of the shift to online instruction and disruptions in learning, many children experienced learning loss, with more significant loss reported for Black, Latino, Indigenous, and multilingual learners (Carroll, 2022; Mesmer, 2022).

At the same time, families noted several positive impacts of the pandemic related to early literacy. With the increased time together for many families, caregivers noted learning more about their children's interests and academic and social needs (Timmons et al., 2021). Children also learned many new skills they may not have had time for before the pandemic (Nkomo et al., 2023), such as navigating online platforms and finding new and creative ways to connect with friends (Pahl et al., 2023; Gavin, 2021).

There were many lessons learned about early literacy from the experiences of young children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Families reading and storytelling with their children on a daily basis can help develop literacy skills and strengthen family bonds (Bao et al., 2020). It is also essential for childcare centers, preschools, elementary schools and other educational partners to collaborate with families in supporting early literacy (Timmons et al., 2021).



Equity needs to be centered in all these partnerships and supports for children and families, which means valuing and connecting with their racial, cultural and linguistic identities (Samuels & Cole-Malott, 2022; Timmons et al., 2021).

Glossary

Comprehension

Reading comprehension is understanding what you are reading. It is an active process during which readers engage with the text (story, picture, song, poem, etc.) and use what they know, the meaning of the words they read, and the way the author writes to understand the meaning of the text.

Concepts of Print

Concepts of print refers to what beginning readers need to understand about how printed language works. These include an understanding that print carries a message, directionality (reading left to right and top to bottom), recognizing key features of a book like the title, front and back cover and the author, identifying the difference between letters and words, and matching spoken to printed words.

Decoding

Decoding is a skill that involves breaking down words into sounds, or phonemes, and then blending them together to read a word. It is the ability to apply what readers know about letter-sound relationships, including knowledge of letter patterns, to correctly pronounce written words.

Fiction

A text that is imagined or invented by the author.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read like you speak. This means reading a text accurately, at an appropriate pace, and with expression.

Literacy

Literacy is the way that we interact with the world around us, how we shape it and are shaped by it. It is how we communicate with others through reading and writing and by speaking, listening, and creating. It is how we share about our experiences in the world (National Council of Teachers of English, 2020).

Nonfiction

A text that is based on real events, people and facts with the goal of



presenting accurate information to the reader through research and sources that can be checked and verified.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic Awareness is:

- the understanding that speech is made-up of a series of sounds (called phonemes).
- the ability to hear the individual sounds that make up words (e.g., /s/ /a/ /t/ is sat—there are the three separate sounds that make up the word sat).
- the ability to change and rearrange sounds to create new words orally (e.g., pink changes to sink if you drop the /p/ and replace the sound with /s/).
- (In the information above, when you see brackets // around a letter, say the sound or sounds, not the letter name.)

Phonics

Phonics is a method of teaching reading, writing, and spelling by matching sounds with symbols, or letters and letter combinations. Phonics is based on the idea that letters represent sounds, which is the foundation for decoding written language.

Reading with Expression

Reading with expression is a skill that involves reading aloud and using your voice to convey the emotions and meaning of a story. This includes varying the pitch and volume of your voice, pausing, using different voices or volumes for different characters, and paying attention to the punctuation used by the author (e.g., raising your voice when a sentence ends in a question mark). Reading with expression brings the story to life and helps with comprehending or understanding the story.

Rereading

Rereading means reading a story or text again and again. Rereading helps readers practice decoding and comprehension skills. This allows the reader to better understand the text.

Rhythm

Rhythm is the flow of sound within a text. It is created by the author's choice of words and how these words are put together.



Rhyme

Rhyme is the repetition of the same or similar sounds at the end of a word (e.g., cat and sat). Rhyme is often used in poems and songs.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the collection of words a reader knows and can use. Vocabulary involves knowing what words mean and how to say and use them correctly.

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Backstory of Raising Readers: CREC developed Growing Together with Books to empower families with the knowledge and tools to support early literacy development. Rooted in research-based practices, including the Raising Readers Parent Club®, Growing Together with Books provides engaging, hands-on learning experiences that strengthen family-school partnerships and foster a love of reading at home. It has evolved to meet the needs of diverse communities, ensuring that all families have access to high-quality literacy resources and support.

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Statewide Family
Engagement Center



Introduction to Growing Together with Books

SESSION



Statewide Family
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Goals

Families will:

- Understand the purpose, structure and components of the Growing Together with Books program.
- Discuss the benefits of reading aloud to children.
- Explore engaging children's books.
- Learn strategies for reading aloud.
- Connect with other family members.

Session Overview

In this first session, families get acquainted with each other and the program leader and learn what to expect from the sessions. The discussion and activities explore how children benefit from reading and sharing books. By watching the program leader model a read-aloud, families will learn tips for reading books to their children.

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and/or computer, projector and screen
- Shared virtual space (optional)
- Journals (one per family)
- Blank bookmarks
- Markers, pens, stickers, etc. to decorate bookmark
- *How to Read to a Grandma or Grandpa* (one copy per family)
- Copies of handouts:
 - Outline of Sessions
(see Program Overview and Logistics section)
 - Book List
 - Choosing a Read Aloud Book for Your Child
 - Great for Kids, Great for Families
 - Tips for Reading Aloud to Young Children
 - Family Activities to Try at Home
- Refreshments for the group (optional)



Welcome and Introductory Activity (15 minutes)

If possible, greet family members as they enter the room or before the session starts. If refreshments are provided, encourage people to get to know each other a bit while enjoying the snacks.

Once everyone is settled, introduce yourself as the group leader. Share a little bit of your background and your reasons for leading this program.

Have family members work with a partner. Ask them to share their names, the names and ages of the children they will read to, and their reasons for joining this group. Have each person introduce their partner to the full group.

Topic Talk (20 minutes)

Program Overview

The goal of this first session is to provide information about the logistics of the program and introduce some key ideas about reading with children.

You may want to display the following agenda on chart paper or a slide projected on screen:

Agenda

- Purpose of program
- Logistics
- Benefits of read-alouds
- Create Your Own Bookmark activity
- Session book and read-aloud strategies





Purpose of the Program:

Share the purpose of the program by reviewing Great for Kids, Great for Families. Answer any questions or concerns the family members have.

Logistics: Explain the following to the families:

Each session will be about 90-minutes long. The session will include time to share, a discussion about the topic for the session, a session activity, introduction of the session book and strategy, and activities to try at home.

- Provide family members with the *Outline of Sessions* (found in the Program Overview and Logistics section) with the dates for all sessions included. Explain the procedures for cancellations and/or rescheduling due to weather, absences, etc.
- Explain that books will be given out at each session to those that attend.
- Share that during discussions everyone is invited and encouraged to participate. Consider asking the group to create norms for discussion. Write these on chart paper (or a slide) and review at each meeting. Ask for the group to agree to the norms.
- Examples:
 - One voice at a time.
 - Listen with respect.
 - Allow others a chance to speak.
- Tell family members that they are encouraged to read to their children for at least 15 minutes a day. Suggest that they keep track of the dates they read to their children by keeping a log, putting a note in their calendar (paper or electronic), or another way of their choice.
- Pass out journals. Recommend that they use these to keep notes on the time they spend with their children reading or engaged in literacy-related activities. This journal could include the titles of books, how the children responded to the books, comments the

children made, at-home activities, and any other information they find interesting or helpful. This can also be done electronically if they prefer. They are encouraged to bring these journals to each session to refer to when they share their thoughts during discussions.

Sample journal entries could include:

- Dates and length of time spent reading to children
- Titles of books
- Children's responses to books including comments
- At-home activities
- Things that went well/Things that were challenging
- Considerations for next time
- Other observations and/or comments

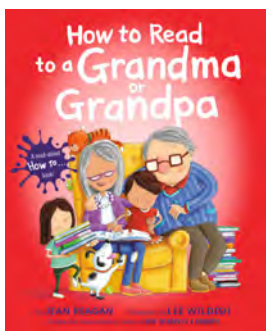
Session Activity (20 minutes)

Create Your Own Bookmark Activity

Share and briefly discuss the information in *Choosing a Read-Aloud Book for Your Child*. Pass out blank bookmarks and other supplies. Have families decorate the bookmarks. Encourage families to decorate the bookmarks with images and/or words that represent characteristics of books to choose for read-alouds, or ones that reflect their children and families. If time, allow family members to share their bookmarks with each other.

Session Book Read-Aloud (30 minutes)

How to Read to a Grandma or Grandpa by Jean Reagan, illustrated by Lee Wildish



There's lots to know about reading a book, and this session's book, *How to Read to a Grandma or Grandpa*, gives children fun tips on how to share the joy of reading with their grandparents. It encourages kids to take the lead in choosing a great book, finding the perfect reading spot, and using their best read-aloud voices. The book can serve as a starting point for a discussion on the



GROUP LEADER TIP

Consider setting up a shared virtual space like a Google folder to allow access to documents and other resources.

Provide information on how to access this information. Since all families may not have access to a virtual space, make sure that the resources are provided to them in other ways as well.

strategies outlined in Tips for Reading Aloud to Young Children. In this session, you will model several of these tips.

Explain to families that a read-aloud will be more successful if they keep a few things in mind. Briefly review the handout and ask families to look for the tips during your read-aloud. As you read, you can pause and discuss how you would incorporate the tips, especially the ones that are hard to model such as choosing a quiet spot or sitting side by side.

After reading the book, talk more in depth about the benefits of the tips and answer any questions the families may have.

Mention that there are many good reasons for rereading a book over and over, especially if their child requests it. Here are a few reasons for rereading:

- Children discover new information, build deeper understandings, and make more connections.
- If a child loves a book, hearing it again and again is plain fun for them.
- Children take comfort in routines that are familiar and predictable, and rereading a book provides this.
- As children become more and more familiar with a book, they begin to see themselves as readers and it builds their confidence.

Before the Next Session (5 minutes)

Pass out Family Activities to Try at Home and encourage families to select at least one activity they would like to try with their children. Remind families to record their experiences in their journals. You can post a question on chart paper or in the shared virtual space that families could respond to in their journals (e.g., What went well with the read-aloud? What was challenging? What did you learn about your child or yourself?)



GROUP LEADER TIP

As you review the Family Activities to Try at Home, it may be worth mentioning to the families that several of the activities focus on building children's oral language.

Share with the families that oral language is an important part of learning to read.





Book List

How to Read to a Grandma or Grandpa
by Jean Reagan, illustrated by Lee Wildish

Two children guide their grandparents through the many parts of reading a book including choosing a good place to read, picking a topic, and what to do after reading! This humorous and engaging book emphasizes the many joys of reading.

The Summer Nick Taught His Cats to Read
by Curtis Manley, illustrated by Kate Berube

Nick wants to share his love of reading with his two cats, Vern and Stevenson, but they have other ideas. When Nick tries various strategies, Vern finds he enjoys books, but Stevenson is still not convinced. Will Nick and Vern find the key to unlock Stevenson's love of reading?

Bunny's Book Club
by Annie Silvestro, illustrated by Tatjana Mai-Wyss

Bunny loves listening to story time outside the library, but when it moves inside, he devises a plan to sneak in through the book drop and convinces his friends to join him. Bunny and his friends show how much fun reading can be.

How Rocket Learned to Read by Tad Hills

A playful dog named Rocket is reluctant to learn to read until he is inspired by a persistent little yellow bird who becomes his teacher. The little bird guides him through the alphabet and the joys of reading, ultimately turning Rocket into an eager reader through their daily lessons together.

Hooray for Reading Day!
by Margery Cuyler, illustrated by Arthur Howard

Jessica struggles with reading aloud in class, often stumbling over words and feeling embarrassed when others laugh. When her school announces a "Reading Theater Day" Jessica worries about making mistakes in front of the parents that will be there, but with practice and the support of her family and her dog, she learns joy of reading aloud.



Miss Brooks Loves Books! (And I Don't)
by Barbara Bottner, illustrated by Michael Emberley

Missy is not a fan of books. She finds them “too flowery, too furry, too clickety, too yippity.” But her enthusiastic librarian, Miss Brooks, is determined to find the perfect book to spark Missy’s interest. With Book Week approaching, Miss Brooks scours the library, determined to convert Missy into a bookworm.

Wild About Books by Judy Sierra, illustrated by Marc Brown

In this rhyming book, librarian Molly McGrew accidentally drives her bookmobile into the zoo, and takes the opportunity to introduce the animals to the wonderful world of reading. She finds the perfect book for each animal – tall books for giraffes, tiny ones for crickets, and even waterproof books for the otter. The animals love reading so much, they decide to start their own Zoobrary!

The Perfect Seat by Minh Lê, illustrated by Gus Gordon

A young moose and their parent look all around the city for the perfect seat to enjoy a story together. They find seats that are too rough, too slippery, too high, too low, and more, until finally they discover that the perfect seat is right in the parent’s lap. Through simple text and engaging illustrations, this story highlights the importance of finding comfort and coziness during reading time.

How to Read a Story by Kate Messner, illustrated by Mark Siegel

This book takes young readers on a step-by-step journey, from choosing a book and finding a cozy reading spot to predicting what will happen next and sharing the story with others. The book celebrates the magic of reading and encourages children to embrace the power of imagination and the joy of storytelling.

Love You, Hug You, Read to You!
by Tish Rabe, illustrated by Frank Endersby

This board book celebrates the bond between a parent and child. Through simple text and vibrant illustrations, the book emphasizes the importance of reading aloud and sharing moments of love and affection. It includes questions for the reader to use with their children to make reading a more interactive experience and create a strong foundation for literacy and lifelong learning.



Great For Kids, Great For Families

Through participation in the *Growing Together with Books* program, you will:

- Learn how to help your children become enthusiastic lifelong readers.
- Begin to build a home library for your family as you receive a new children's book at each session.
- Discover how to choose engaging, age-appropriate books that your children will love.
- Learn how home reading prepares your children for success in school.
- Share your experiences with other families in a supportive space.
- Get ideas for easy, inexpensive, fun activities you can do at home to help support your children's development, creativity and love of books.
- Enjoy beverages, refreshments and good company.
- As a participant, you are encouraged to:
- Share books with your children for at least 15 minutes per day.
- Attend each of the six sessions of the program.

Choosing a Read Aloud Book for Your Child

Look for:

- Topics and characters that interest your child, but don't be afraid to try something new!
 - Some children enjoy books with familiar settings and themes, while others love hearing stories about ideas and places that are beyond their experiences.
- Age-appropriate plots and vocabulary.



- Stretch children by exposing them to new ideas and words, but if there are too many new words and ideas, the children may find the story confusing.
- Engaging illustrations that enhance the story.
- Children should be encouraged to retell the story using the pictures.
- Repetitive language, rhyme, predictable patterns.
 - These are fun to listen to and read.

Characteristics of Books by Age Group

Ages 0–4: Board and soft books with colorful illustrations which often focus on basic concepts such as counting or colors, or simple stories.

Ages 3–8: Picture books with more complex stories and illustrations that support and enhance the text. In general, these are meant to be read to the child rather than the child reading them independently.

Ages 4–8: Early/easy readers designed for beginning readers to read independently.

Ages 6–9: First chapter books and graphic novels are longer than early/easy readers and have more text and fewer illustrations.

Ages 8–12: Middle-grade novels and graphic novels have complex themes, more complicated plots, and multiple main characters.

Ages 12–18: Young adult (YA) novels and graphic novels often feature coming-of-age stories and more mature themes and issues.

Tips for Reading Aloud to Young Children

Read together every day.

Children who have enjoyed family story time won't want to give it up.

Choose a quiet spot.

Too much noise and activity will distract the child.



Hold your child on your lap (or sit side-by-side with older kids).
The special closeness is one of the most important parts of story sharing.

Make sure your child can see the pictures.

Have them sit next to you or on your lap so you can look at and talk about the pictures together.

Make it fun.

Don't worry about teaching your child to read. Just enjoy the wonderful stories and time together.

Introduce the book.

Read the title and the names of the author and illustrator.

Involve your child in the story reading.

Encourage your child to choose the books, turn the pages, chime in on repeated phrases and rhyming words, and ask lots of questions. Talk together about the story and the pictures.

Make the story come alive.

Fill your voice with expression and add in sound effects as you read. Change the pacing. Create voices for the story characters. Use your body to tell the story.

Don't worry about reading every word perfectly.

All readers make mistakes! It is natural to go back and re-read a sentence if you've made a mistake. If you want, you can read the book to yourself before reading it to your child.

Refer to the story. Read it again.

In the hours or days after reading the story, bring up the story by saying things like, "This reminds me of the story _____ because _____" or "This reminds me of the person in the story because _____."





Family Activities to Try at Home

Reading in the World

Let your child join in as you read words you come across in the world. These can be labels on boxes or cans, signs in the neighborhood, words on appliances or devices – any word you come across can help your child grow as a reader!

Books, Books, Books

If you keep all of your children's books in one place, try moving them around. Put some in the living room, some in the bedrooms, some in the kitchen, and even some in the bathroom. Put them in stacks on the tables, or down on the floor for babies and young toddlers. View them as you would toys and have them everywhere your children play.

Stories, Stories, Stories

Sack stories can be fun. Place a small toy, object, family picture, or even a magazine picture in a bag or sack. Start telling a story, pause and let your child pick an object from the sack, then continue with the story using the object in your story. You can let your child tell their own story with the objects.

I Spy

"I Spy" is a game that can be played almost anywhere! Look at your surroundings and choose an object that both you and your child can see. Give "I spy" clues such as, "I spy something that is red" or "I spy something that is a toy." After each clue, give your child a chance to guess the object. Once your child guesses correctly, they can take a turn choosing the object and giving clues. This game can also be played using pictures in a book or magazine.

Sorting Game

Give your child a bag to fill with objects in a certain category (e.g., blue, animals, round, things that belong in the kitchen, etc.) This activity can also be done using pictures by having your child point to object in the category.





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Myrick, A. (2016 December 17). *Age levels for children's books*. Book Editing Associates. <https://www.book-editing.com/age-levels-childrens-books/>

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2

SESSION

Rhythm and Rhyme



Statewide Family
Engagement Center



Goals

Families will:

- Experience the delight of poetry and song.
- Discuss how young children respond to rhythm and rhyme and how rhyming books will enhance their reading and language skills.
- Participate in an activity centered around poetry and/or song.
- Learn strategies for reading aloud.

Session Overview

This session will highlight the joys of rhythm and rhyme used in text, poetry and song. Family members will discuss how read-alouds with rhythm and rhyme support their children's development of literacy skills.

Materials Needed

- Computer, projector and screen (for videos)
- Chart paper and markers (optional)
- Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young (one copy per family)
- Copies of handouts:
 - Book List
 - Tips for Reading Aloud Poems or Rhyming Stories
 - Family Activities to Try at Home
- Refreshments for the group (optional)

Recap of Last Week (15 minutes)

Select a couple of the questions below to ask families and have families share their responses with each other.

- What went well?
- What was challenging?
- What was your child's response to the book?



- Would anyone like to share something they recorded in their journal?
- Share something that surprised you when reading with your child last week.
- How did it go using last week's strategy?
- Did you use any other strategies?

Topic Talk (20 minutes)

The Benefits of Rhythm and Rhyme

Share an example of a poem, nursery rhyme, song, or jingle you remember from your childhood. Ask family members to share some they remember. Discuss why we can remember these after so many years. Share that research shows that rhythm and rhyme help with memory.

In addition to being easier to remember, poems, songs, rhymes, and jingles help with foundational literacy skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency and motivation. And children (and adults) usually find these fun and enjoyable! Ask family members what some other benefits might be in using these types of read-alouds.

Read aloud this quote from award-winning poet, author and educator Georgia Heard (www.georgiaheard.com):

"Poetry, like bread, is for everyone...It can also help our students open their eyes to the beauty of the earth, restore a belief in the power of language, and help them begin to understand the truths inside them." Georgia Heard, *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School*.

Ask families what the quote means to them. Ask them to share about a time when a poem, song, or jingle moved them. Remind families that because of their rhythm and rhyme, poems, songs and jingles are meant to be shared out loud, not just read silently in a book!





Session Activity (20 minutes)

Make the Words Come Alive!

Ask families to share their ideas about how reading a poem or rhyme is different from reading a story.

Watch one or two videos and ask families what they noticed about how the poems are read out loud. Encourage families to find videos of fingerplays online to learn and use with their young children.

- **“Noodles” by Janet Wong** (1:06 minutes)

<https://vimeo.com/416650387>

Janet S. Wong shares how poems can bring joy and recites her poem “Noodles.”

- **“Everyday Me” by Marnie Dallan:**

Children’s Book of Poetry Read Aloud (5:07)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRT8vaBzSAM>

- A child’s voice reads several poems from the pages of Marnie Dallan’s book.

- **Fingerplays with Ms. Nina #1** (5:03)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQ9kYT49oPI>

From Wichita Public Library. Examples of fingerplays.

- **Wee Rhymes**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-soQw3fwbE>

From Coralville Public Library Examples of fingerplays

Share *Tips for Reading Poems or Rhyming Stories*. Acknowledge that families may have mentioned some of the tips that are on this list. Highlight the importance of reading with expression.

Read the poem to yourself before reading it to your child. Notice the rhythm and rhyme. Look up any words that are not familiar.

- Read with expression. Decide which words need to be read louder, softer, faster, slower. When should you pause between words? How can you change your voice for different



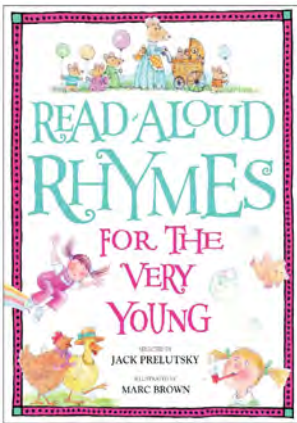
characters? The punctuation (exclamation points, ellipses) and font (size, bold, italics) may help you with this.

- What is the poem about? Read to convey the emotion of the poem.
- Enjoy and have fun!

Session Book Read-Aloud (30 minutes)

Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young

by Jack Prelutsky (Compiler), illustrated by Marc Brown



Model reading several of the poems from the session book. Read each poem twice – the first time with rhythm or expression, the second time with lots of rhythm and expression. Have families discuss the differences between the two readings.

Have families select several poems to read. Ask them to practice reading it to themselves, then read it out loud to a partner or the group. Ask them what they did to ensure they read with expression.

Before the Next Session (5 minutes)

Pass out **Family Activities to Try at Home** and encourage families to select at least one activity they would like to try with their children. Remind families to record their experiences in their journals. You can post a question on chart paper or in the shared virtual space that families could respond to in their journals (e.g., How did your child respond to the poems and rhymes? What was easy about reading with rhythm and expression? What made it challenging? What did you learn about your child or yourself?)





Book List

Poetry Books

Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young
by Jack Prelutsky (Compiler), illustrated by Marc Brown

Jack Prelutsky, a well-known and beloved children's poet, has compiled more than 200 short poems to reflect the many varied interests of young children. Illustrations by award-winning artist Marc Brown add to the appeal of the engaging poems.

Here's A Little Poem: A Very First Book of Poetry
by Jane Yolen (Compiler), Andrew Fusek Peters (Compiler),
illustrated by Polly Dunbar

This collection features more than sixty poems about the everyday experiences of toddlers with illustrations that bring the poems to life. The book is a great way to introduce poetry to children.

The Random House Book of Poetry for Children
by Jack Prelutsky (Compiler), illustrated by Arnold Lobel

The nation's first Children's Poet Laureate, Jack Prelutsky, has gathered 572 poems, ranging from the classic to the contemporary. Every child is sure to find a few poems that capture their imagination.

My Village: Rhymes from Around the World
by Danielle Wright (Compiler),
illustrated by Mique Moriuchi, introduction by Michael Rosen

Twenty-two nursery rhymes from around the world are presented in their original language next to the English translation.

Fingerplays & Jump Rope Rhymes

Anna Banana: 101 Jump Rope Rhymes
by Joanna Cole, illustrated by Alan Tiegreen

Great for children who are learning to read and learning to jump rope! The rhymes help children keep the rhythm of jumping, while entertaining them with fun and humorous topics.

The Book of Fingerplays & Action Songs: Revised Edition
(First Steps in Music series) by John Feierabend



Children will be engaged by this book which pairs classic children's songs with movement.

Rhyming Story Books

Octopus Shocktopus

by Peter Bently, Illustrated by Steven Lenten

In this rhyming book, an octopus lands on a house and the children of the neighborhood befriend it.

Farm Boots

by Lisl H. Detlefsen, illustrated by Renee Kurilla

Boots are worn all year long when you live on a farm! Life on a farm through all four seasons is described through rhythm and rhyme.

Let's Make Pizza with Carlizza by Sylvia Tabor

Carlizza shows us how to make a homemade pizza and even includes her recipe!

Frog on a Log? by Kes Gray, illustrated by Jim Field

Frog does not want to sit on a log! Through rhythm and rhyme, this humorous book explores the best places for animals to sit.

Tips for Reading Poems or Rhyming Stories

Read the poem to yourself before reading it to your child. Notice the rhythm and rhyme. Look up any words that are not familiar.

Read with expression.

Decide which words need to be read louder, softer, faster, slower.

When should you pause between words?

How can you change your voice for different characters?

The punctuation marks (exclamation points, ellipses) and font (size, bold, italics) may help you with this.

What is the poem about? Read to convey the emotion of the poem. Enjoy and have fun!



Family Activities to Try at Home

Phonemic Awareness

(In the following section, when you see brackets // around a letter, say the sound or sounds, not the letter name.)

Phonemic Awareness is:

- the understanding that speech is made-up of a series of sounds (called phonemes).
- the ability to hear the individual sounds that make up words (e.g., /s/ /a/ /t/ is “sat”—there are the three separate sounds that make up the word “sat”).
- the ability to change and rearrange sounds to create new words orally (e.g., change “pink” to “sink” by changing the /p/ sound to /s/).

Here are some fun ways to help a child become aware of sounds:

- Sing nursery rhymes and songs
 - Clap, tap, jump, snap and stomp to the rhythm.
 - Use instruments or household objects (cardboard boxes, kitchen utensils, spoons, etc.) to play the rhythm.
- Play rhyming games
 - I am thinking of an animal that rhymes with *hat*. What is the animal? Answers: *cat*, *bat*, *rat*. What else rhymes with *hat*?
 - What words can you think of that rhyme with *ball*?
- Blend sounds into words
 - What word do these sounds make? /h/ /o/ /p/ Answer: hop
- Separate words into sounds
 - There are three sounds in dog. What are they? /d/ /o/ /g/



- Join in word play where children change beginning, middle, and ending sounds
 - The word is cake. If I change /c/ to /sn/, what is the word? Answer: snake.
 - The word is big. If I change /i/ to /a/, what is the word? Answer: bag.
 - The word is pan. If I change /n/ to /t/, what is the word? Answer: pat.

Finger Play

Find a finger play to act out and recite with your child. Search “fingerplays for children” on the internet. Select a few to repeat again and again!

A New Routine by Heart

Learn a poem or rhyme by heart and recite it to your child every day. Create a new routine with a regular bedtime poem, a mealtime poem, or a riding in the car poem. Help your child choose a poem that they would like to memorize. Write or print out the poems to create your own book of favorite poems.

References

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3 SESSION

Family Feelings



Statewide Family
Engagement Center



Goals

Families will:

- Explore how recognizing and sharing feelings is an important part of wellness.
- Discuss how to support children with expressing their feelings.
- Explore how children's books can promote learning about and sharing feelings.
- Learn strategies for reading aloud.

Session Overview

Families will explore why it is important to support children with expressing their feelings. Families will discuss how to model sharing and talking about feelings with their children. Children's picture books are a great way to begin these conversations. Through looking at and talking about what characters say and what they show or do with their faces and body, families can introduce feeling words and ways to respond to big feelings.

Materials Needed

- Computer, projector and screen (for videos)
- Chart paper and markers (optional)
- *Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale* (one copy per family)
- Books for families to look through (one per family member, could be from the Book List)
- Feeling Faces printed and cut out (you might want to print on card stock or attach to popsicle sticks to make it easier to use them)
- Copies of handouts:
 - Book List
 - Family Activities to Try at Home
- Refreshments for the group (optional)



Recap of Last Week (15 minutes)

Select a couple of the questions below to ask families and have families share their responses with each other.

- What was challenging?
- What was your child's response to the book?
- Would anyone like to share something they recorded in their journal?
- Share something that surprised you when reading with your child last week.
- How did it go using last week's strategy?
- Did you use any other strategies?

Topic Talk (20 minutes)

Sharing Feelings

Share with families that it is important to learn about and explore feelings with children. This helps children develop empathy, positive relationships with others, and ways to deal with strong emotions. Children's emotional health impacts their development and learning. According to research, children who are emotionally healthy are more likely to be happier, motivated to learn, have a positive attitude towards school and perform better academically (Hyson 2004; Kostelnik et al. 2015 as cited in Ho & Funk, 2018).

To help children understand and share their feelings, it is recommended that family members:

- Share their own feelings;
- Help children label their feelings; and
- Read books, play games and sing songs about feelings (Head Start, 2024).

As a group, watch the video, PBS Kids Talk About Feelings and Emotions. (Share video until 5:13 or the entire 9-minute video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGgC8i5dQHk>



After watching the video, have a brief whole group discussion (5 minutes) using the guiding questions below.

- Why is it important to talk about feelings? What did you hear and what do you think?
- Who do you share your feelings with?
- Who does your child share their feelings with? How does your child share their feelings?

Session Activity (20 minutes)

Feelings Faces Scavenger Hunt

Introduce the Feeling Faces cards to families. Free printable Feeling Faces cards can be found at <http://www.earlylearningactivities.com/PDF/ffacesnew.pdf> and <https://challengingbehavior.org/document/feeling-faces-cards-english-blank/>.

Print a copy of the cards to use for this activity and let families know they will receive a copy to bring home. (Printing the faces on card stock or attaching them to popsicle sticks can make them easier to show and use.) Show a few of the cards and ask families to discuss why the face shows a particular emotion (e.g., Why does this face show the feeling angry? The eyebrows are scrunched and the mouth is tight).

Bring one book for each family member in the group (make sure books have characters who are feeling different emotions; you could bring copies of the books on the Additional Books list). Give family members a few minutes to look through their book. Next, hold up one of the Feeling Face cards and ask families to find a character in their book who is feeling that way. Have one or two people share about the character they found and how they know they are feeling that way. You may want to ask: What is the character saying, doing or showing with their face or body that makes you think they are feeling that way? Discuss if there are any other ways to show that same feeling.

Session Book Read-Aloud (30 minutes)

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale by Mo Willems



Knuffle Bunny is a book about a little girl, Trixie, and her dad who take a trip to the laundromat where she loses her favorite stuffed animal bunny. Mo Willems, the author and illustrator, uses facial expressions,



body language and movement to show how the characters are feeling. The strategy you will model for families today is discussing the pictures. In children's picture books, the illustrations are as important as the words. The pictures bring the story to life and show us a lot about the characters in the story. Share with families that today as you read together, you are going to focus on how the characters are feeling and how you know by looking closely at the pictures. There are two main characters in the book, a little girl Trixie who is a toddler, and her dad.

As you read, stop to discuss the pictures. Talk with families about what you can see in the pictures and how the pictures show readers what the characters are feeling. (e.g., How is Trixie feeling as they walk? She is smiling, so I think she is happy or maybe excited to be out with her dad.) Below are some guiding questions that you can ask while you are reading the book.

- How is Trixie feeling? How do you know? (You could have the person who wants to answer select the Feeling Face card that shows how the character is feeling.)
- How is her father feeling (especially when she is yelling or going boneless) and how do you know? Have you ever felt that way as a parent?
- What do Trixie or her dad say, do, or show with their face or body that lets you know they are feeling that way?
- How do you know when your child is feeling that way? What do they say, do or show with their face or body?
- Why was it helpful for Trixie to share this emotion with her dad?

After reading the book, have a whole group discussion about what families and their children can do when they are having a big feeling. You may want to record the ideas on chart paper, a blank slide, or a document you can share with the group. Remind families to think back to the PBS Kids video and to share strategies they use in their own lives.



**GROUP LEADER TIP**

Let families know that there are many supports to help them talk about and process their feelings as adults and to help their children talk about and process feelings, especially when these feelings are strong or feel overwhelming.

Their child's pediatrician is a resource as well. School social workers and counselors.

They can call 211 and operators will help them to find to local mental health providers and supports, if needed.

What can you do when you are having a big feeling? (Sample responses)

- Journaling
- Talking to friends
- Drawing
- Petting or playing with pets
- Talking with caregivers or siblings
- Talking to or cuddling with stuffed animal
- Tapping fingers
- Taking deep breaths
- Other strategies?

Before the Next Session (5 minutes)

Pass out **Family Activities to Try at Home** and encourage families to select at least one activity they would like to try with their children. Remind families to record their experiences in their journals. You can post a question on chart paper or in the shared virtual space that families could respond to in their journals (e.g., What did you learn about your child and their feelings?).

Book List

Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems

Knuffle Bunny is the story of Trixie, a little girl who loses her favorite stuffed bunny at the Laundromat. She cannot yet talk and tries many different ways to let her Dad know that *Knuffle Bunny* is lost. Her mom helps figure out the mystery and the family rushes back to the laundromat to rescue *Knuffle Bunny*.

Llama, Llama Mad at Mama by Anna Dewdney

Llama does not want to leave his toys to go shopping with Mama at Shop-O-Rama. He waits and waits for her to finish, getting frustrated and finally having a meltdown in the middle of the store. Mama finds ways to soothe him and make the shopping experience more fun for both of them.

Grumpy Monkey by Suzanne Lang, illustrated by Max Lang



Jim is a chimpanzee who wakes up in a bad mood for no reason. His friends try many ways to cheer him up, but they do not work. Jim just needs to feel grumpy for a while. This book teaches children that sometimes it's okay to just feel grumpy and that friends can support you through those feelings.

A Pocket Full of Sads

by Brad Davidson, illustrated by Rachel Más Davidson

Rabbit is very excited to go fishing with Bear, but Bear is not feeling up to it. He feels like he has a pocket full of sads weighing him down. Rabbit is sure she can figure out why and fix it. They try lots of things, but nothing seems to help. Rabbit learns that what Bear needs is just a friend to listen and be with him while he feels down

Making Faces: A First Book of Emotions by Abrams Appleseed

This board book shows a new emotion on each page with a photograph of a real baby making a face. The simple text follows the same pattern on each page, telling how the baby is feeling and asking you to make a face that shows the same emotion (happy, surprised, angry, sad and silly). The book ends with a mirror so children can see their own faces.

The Day You Begin

by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López

When Angelina, enters her classroom, she notices that her brown skin and the curl of her hair are different than her classmates'. This book explores several students at the school who feel like outsiders because of things like the language that they speak or the food they eat. When Angelina finds the courage to share about her summer, she connects with others and discovers that there is joy in celebrating differences and connecting across them.

Visiting Feelings

by Lauren J. Rubenstein, illustrated by Shelly Hehenberger

Visiting Feelings encourages children to see their emotions as visitors - welcome feelings in, get to know them, and be curious about why they showed up. This book explores all feelings, positive and negative, as guests in our minds that help us learn about ourselves.

Sesame Workshop and Sesame Street on PBS Kids have several videos and songs that teach young children about feelings and emotions.

https://cptv.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/sesame_street/t/sesame-street-emotional-development/

<https://sesameworkshop.org/resources/the-feelings-garden/>

Family Activities to Try at Home

Making Space for Feelings

Together as a family, create a space at home where your child and any family member can go when they are having big feelings. This might be in your child's bedroom or a common area in the home. Talk about the kinds of things your child and other family members prefer to do when they are having a big feeling. This may be drawing, cuddling with a stuffed animal, reading a book, fidgeting with toys or squishing play dough. You could put a few of these items in the space. You could also include the Feeling Faces cards in this space to invite your child to name their feelings and share them.

Rose, Thorn, Seed

At dinner or before bed, take turns sharing about your day. This could involve the whole family, each person having time to share. You may want to model by sharing first. This sharing game models that we all have many feelings every day, both positive and difficult feelings, and that is ok.

- Share a **Rose** – something you enjoyed or went well or something that made you feel happy or glad
- Share a **Thorn** – something that was hard for you or that made you feel bad, sad, scared or worried
- Share a **Seed** – something you are excited about or looking forward to

Feeling Faces

Free printable Feeling Faces cards can be found at <http://www.earlylearningactivities.com/PDF/ffacesnew.pdf> and <https://challengingbehavior.org/document/feeling-faces-cards-english-blank/> Use the Feeling Faces cards to practice talking about feelings with your child. You can focus on one or two feelings cards each time. Show your child the card, talk about what the face shows and the feeling word that describes the face (angry, sad, mad, etc.). You and your child can try to make that same face. Talk together about when





you feel that feeling and what makes you feel that way. Make sure to ask your child to share what makes them feel that way.

Act it out! Put the Feeling Faces cards in a pile upside down or in a bag or a hat. Have your child choose one without showing you. Have your child act out the feeling and while you try to guess what feeling it is. Take turns acting out feelings and guessing. Have fun!

Make a Feeling Faces book together. Tape or glue each Feeling Face on a page and have your child write or draw when they feel that way. You or other family members can join in and write or draw when you feel that way too. Add the book to your bookshelf, read the book together often and talk about feelings.

Music for My Mood

Create playlists of songs for different feelings with your child or for your child, depending on their age. Share what songs or types of music you like to listen to when you are feeling excited or calm or sad. You can move or dance together to the music and talk about how your body feels as you listen and move to the music. There are playlists of feeling songs for kids on popular music apps such as Spotify and Apple Music.

Resource for Teaching Your Child About Feelings

Follow the link below to learn more about Teaching Your Child About Feelings from Head Start Early Learning and Knowledge Center. It is available in multiple languages (Arabic, Chinese, Haitian, Somali, Vietnamese).

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/teaching-your-child-about-feelings>





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4

SESSION

Who Am I? Who Are You?



Statewide Family
Engagement Center



Goals

Families will:

- Reflect on and share about their own identities.
- Explore how children's books can promote learning about self and others.
- Learn strategies for reading aloud.

Session Overview

Families will explore how to support children in learning more about themselves and others. Families will reflect on identities, what they are and how they shape who we are and how we live. Through the growing collection of diverse children's books, children can learn more about what makes them who they are and more about people who look, talk and live differently than them.

Materials Needed

- Computer, projector and screen (for videos)
- Chart paper
- Printer or construction paper
- Markers, pens, or colored pencils
- Books for families to look through
- *Looking Like Me* (one copy per family)
- Copies of handouts:
 - Book List
 - Family Activities to Try at Home
- Refreshments for the group (optional)





Recap of Last Week (15 minutes)

Select a couple of the questions below to ask families and have families share their responses with each other.

- What went well?
- What was challenging?
- What was your child's response to the book?
- Would anyone like to share something they recorded in their journal?
- Share something that surprised you when reading with your child last week.
- How did it go using last week's strategy?
- Did you use any other strategies?

Topic Talk (20 minutes)

Who Am I?

Share with families that children's books are a great way to support children in exploring who they are and in learning about others. Identities are the many factors that make us who we are. Ask families what they think of when they hear the word identity. If the group is quiet, you may want to share first, as a model ("When I hear the word identity, I think about age and how old I am.") As families share, record their ideas on chart paper or on a slide. Ideas may include: race, ethnicity, language, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, job, family, culture, disability, sports and hobbies, etc.

Ask families to create an identity web that reflects their identities. Pass out a sheet of paper to each participant and have them write their name in the middle. Let families know that they can create their identity web any way they would like – words covering the page, images or drawings, etc. You may want to model this for families by beginning your own identity web or have a sample identity web to share with them. Let families know they will only be sharing the parts of their web that they feel comfortable sharing with a partner. Give families time to create their identity web and then ask them to share a couple parts of their web with a partner. After partners share, bring the group back together and ask families what was similar and different about their identities' and their partners' identities.



GROUP LEADER NOTE

Please bring books with characters that reflect a variety of identities (race, ethnicity, language, gender, family make up, sexual orientation, etc.).

The list of session books is a great place to start.

You could bring one of each title for families to explore.

Stories Shape Us: Windows and Mirrors

Historically, children's books have not represented the diverse identities of children and families in Connecticut and across the United States. Most children's books were about White children, White families or animals. Books about people of color have also been typically more expensive and harder to find. Luckily, within the past ten years, the number of diverse books written by diverse authors has quadrupled (Cooperative Children's Book Center). With organizations such as The Cooperative Children's Book Center (<https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/>) and We Need Diverse Books (<https://diversebooks.org/>) and with the advocacy of families, educators and authors, diverse books by diverse authors have become more widely available.

Share with families that all children benefit from reading books about people with a variety of identities and experiences. When these books are about people who look, talk and live like a child, the books can act like a mirror for that child, a way to learn more about themselves and to take pride in their identities. When books are about people who look, talk and live differently than a child, these books can be a window into other peoples' experiences and ways for that child to learn and talk about differences.

Session Activity (20 minutes)

Windows and Mirrors

Using this idea of mirrors and windows, ask families to look through the collection of books you have brought. Have families find a book that is a mirror of at least one of their identities (e.g., the character may be of a different race but speaks two languages like they do; or the character may be a different gender but loves cooking too).

Ask them to think about:

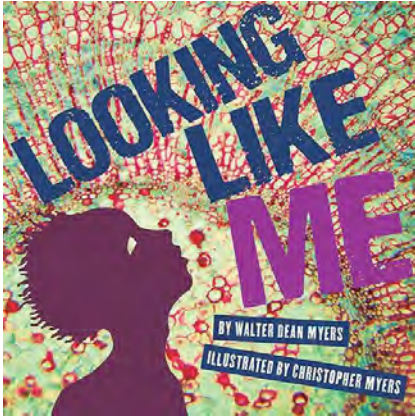
- How is this book a mirror?
- How are the characters/families in the book like you? (what they look like, how they talk/languages used, ways they play or talk to each other, foods that they eat, etc.)
- What would you want to share with your child about this book if you were reading it together?

Have families share their ideas about how their book is a mirror with a partner or the whole group.

Session Book Read-Aloud (30 minutes)

Looking Like Me

by Walter Dean Myers, illustrated by Christopher Myers



This week's book, *Looking Like Me*, focuses on a boy named Jeremy who learns all about himself as he talks with friends, family members and neighbors. The text also connects with last week's theme of rhythm and rhyme, with rhyming text and the refrain of giving people a BAM! (fist bump). The strategy you will be modeling this week for families is making connections. It helps readers

to understand a story when they make connections with their own lives, the world around them and/or another book they have read. This week the connections you will focus on are connections with children's own lives and the world around them.

Model reading the book aloud for families with a focus on identity and what Jeremy is learning about himself. A fun way to engage children in the read-aloud is to have them give you a BAM (fist bump) every time Jeremy gives one to a character. As you read, you could ask families to give a fist bump to the air every time Jeremy does. Point out the word BAM!, which is on every two-page spread. Families can point out the word to their child and have them say it with them every time they read it aloud.

Ask families to think about how this book is a window or a mirror for them and their children.

- How is Jeremy like you? (Do you have a sister? Do you like to run?)
- How is he different than you?

Share that as families read this with their children, they can highlight one of their child's identities and why they appreciate it about them, just like Jeremy's sister and mom share with him. After you have finished reading, ask families to share one thing they are. This could be something the same as Jeremy or something different. They should use the sentence starter, "I am..." Encourage families to have their children share with them one thing they are as they read this book together.





Before the Next Session (5 minutes)

Pass out **Family Activities to Try at Home** and encourage families to select at least one activity they would like to try with their children. Remind families to record their experiences in their journals. You can post a question on chart paper or in the shared virtual space that families could respond to in their journals (e.g., What did you learn about your child? What did they learn about you or your family?)

Book List

Looking Like Me

by Walter Dean Myers, illustrated by Christopher Myers

Jeremy learns all about himself as he walks around his neighborhood and talks with friends, family members and neighbors.

Hair Love (book and short film)

by Matthew A. Cherry, illustrated by Vashti Harrison

This book, based on the animated short film, is about Zuri, a young Black girl who loves her natural hair and all the different ways it can be styled. When her father tries to style her hair for the first time, he has a lot to learn. Together they watch a tutorial video and successfully style her hair for a special occasion.

Short Film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNw8V_Fkw28

Love Makes a Family by Sophie Beer

This colorfully illustrated board book shows a variety of families doing everyday activities that demonstrate love, such as baking a cake, reading a book and getting ready for bed. The story celebrates love as the center of a family and how every family is special in its own way.

Eyes that Kiss in the Corners by Joanna Ho, illustrated by Dung Ho

This is the story of a young Taiwanese girl who notices her eyes look different than her friends'. She realizes that her eyes are like her mother's, grandmother's and sister's, eyes that kiss in the corner. This book is about celebrating identity, connections with family, and loving oneself.



Who Am I? by Julie Buckholtz, illustrated by Aliyah Ghare

Written from an Indigenous perspective, this is the story of a mother telling her daughter about her identity and how it connects with the world around her. This story shares how we are all connected to our ancestors, our past and future, and the Earth.

I Love You Baby Burrito by Angela Dominguez

This board book celebrates the joy of having a new baby. It is the story of new parents who bring their baby home and swaddle them like a burrito. The book includes Spanish phrases throughout.

The Proudest Blue by Ibtihaj Muhammad, Art by Hatem Aly

Written by Olympic medalist Ibtihaj Muhammad, this is the story of sisters Asiya and Faizah on the first day of school. Asiya, the older sister, wears a hijab for the first time and faces challenges and teasing because of others' misunderstandings about it. Faizah is inspired by her sister's strength and pride in wearing the hijab throughout the day. *The Proudest Blue* promotes self-acceptance, standing up for one's beliefs, and embracing cultural identity.

Julián is a Mermaid by Jessica Love

Julián notices women dressed up as mermaids on the subway and is inspired to dress as a mermaid himself. While unsure at first, Abuela encourages him to dress as he likes and takes him to a mermaid parade where he is excited to be part of the celebration. This story centers on individuality and self-expression.

Where Are You From? by Yamile Saied Méndez, illustrated by Jaime Kim (also available in Spanish)

The little girl in this story is asked where she is from by other children and adults. She turns to her abuelo (grandfather) for help. He shares all the places, people and history she comes from. This book addresses the insensitive questions that some people face about their heritage. The story celebrates identity and connections with family culture.





Family Activities to Try at Home

Looking at Me: Self Portraits

Sit in front of a mirror with your child or with the camera on your phone facing you. Talk about the way you look and what you love about yourself. Have your child do the same. ("I have brown eyes and freckles. I love my freckles! They are like little stars covering my cheeks.") Next, take some time to draw self-portraits together. These could just be of your face or your whole body. This is a great activity to do every year and to keep a collection of self-portraits. It is fun for you and your child to see how they draw themselves over time, what they focus on, what they include in the picture, how they draw different parts, etc.

Looking at Us: A Family Video

With your child, ask each member of the family to share something about themselves using the sentence starter "I am ____" like Jeremy in the book *Looking at Me*. You could create a video using a smartphone to record family members talking about themselves. If your child is old enough and has an interest in editing video clips, have them get creative - add filters, text or music - and have fun!

Turn Up the Music!

Create a playlist of music from different cultures and countries or find one created by a music app like YouTube, Spotify, Pandora, or Apple Music. Listen to the songs with your child and talk about the different rhythms, beats and instruments that you hear. Have a dance party and enjoy moving to the music!

Our Family Stories

What are some special things that you would like your child to know about your family's identities or cultural background? Think of ways you can teach your child about these things: make a family recipe together, tell them a funny or important family story, look at old photographs, visit relatives and ask them to share stories from their childhood.





5

SESSION

A Visit to the Library



Statewide Family
Engagement Center



Goals

Families will:

- Visit a local library and learn about its collection, classes and services.
- Apply for a library card.
- Explore children's books at the library.
- Learn strategies for reading aloud.

Session Overview

Families will make a connection with the local library and explore what books, resources and services it has to offer. Before the session, reach out to a children's librarian to see if they can speak with the group and give a tour of the library. Many libraries offer spaces for groups to meet, which can be scheduled online. See if there is a space where the group can meet at the library and reserve the space. For this session, you may want to hold a short meeting with families, invite the librarian to speak and give a tour, and the families to explore the space and book collection. If a tour of the library is not possible, you can invite a librarian to speak with the group and share materials.

Materials Needed

- ** Scheduled time to visit the local library with a space reserved and time to meet with the librarian and have a tour
- *A Library* (one copy per family)
- Copies of handouts:
 - Book List
 - Family Activities to Try at Home
- Refreshments for the group (optional)
- Ask families to bring proof of residency in the town, if they are interested in applying for a library card (a valid form of identification with their name and current address - driver's license, student ID, passport, checkbook, canceled mail, or ask the library about additional forms of verification)

**GROUP LEADER TIP**

The order and timing of this session is different from others to allow time for the librarian to talk with the group and give a tour and for families to get library cards and explore the space.

Recap of Last Week (15 minutes)

Select a couple of the questions below to ask families and have families share their responses with each other.

- What was challenging?
- What was your child's response to the book?
- Would anyone like to share something they recorded in their journal?
- Share something that surprised you when reading with your child last week.
- How did it go using last week's strategy?
- Did you use any other strategies?

***The order and timing of this session is different from others to allow time for the librarian to talk with the group and give a tour and for families to get library cards and explore the space.**

Session Book Read-Aloud (25 minutes)

A Library

by Nikki Giovanni, illustrated by Erin K. Robinson



Share with families that it is exciting that you can all come together at the library today! Let them know that today's session will be a little different than the others. First, you will read the session book. Then, the librarian will join the group to share information about the library and to give them a tour. Finally, families will have time to apply for a library card and explore the space.

Ask families if they have even been to the library. For families who have been to the library, ask them to share when they came, what they did there, if they have a library card, etc. Have families share any things they are wondering about the library.

Today you will be reading the book *A Library* by world-famous African American author and poet, Nikki Giovanni. The story is about a little



girl who visits a library and finds a place that lets her explore lots of different things through reading books. While reading to families, you will be modeling the strategy of stopping and wondering out loud. Thinking aloud while you read models for children how skilled readers make sense of what they are reading. This helps children with reading comprehension, understanding what they read as they read it. Share with families that this strategy is saying out loud the little thoughts, questions and connections that come up while you read and ask children to share any that come up for them. Below are a few examples of places to stop and wonder while reading the book.

- The title is *A Library*, and I see a girl standing smiling with books, I think she might be visiting a library.
- I wonder where she lives. I thought it was a farm in the beginning with all the green grass, but now it looks like a city with cars and buildings. What do you think?
- I wonder what the girl is thinking about as she sits on the floor of the library. I think it must be something good because she is smiling and there are rays of light shining on her.
- I wonder what kinds of books she is reading. Maybe a cookbook or an adventure story? She looks like she is going somewhere on a boat. I love adventure stories!

Topic Talk (45 minutes)

Library Talk and Tour

It would be good to ask the librarian to share during this time. The librarian can share about the purpose of a library and the resources, services, and classes it offers for children and families. You could also ask the librarian to share about any upcoming events or classes that may be of interest. Many libraries offer free arts and museum passes that allow families free or reduced admission to museums and events across the state.

Next, have the librarian give a brief tour of the space. If the librarian does not have time, take the group on a tour, noting the children, adult and teen sections, fiction and nonfiction books, books in multiple languages, audio books, computers that are free to use and any other important parts of the space.



Provide time for families to apply for a library card at the service desk and to explore the space. Encourage families who have a card or who get a card to check out a book for their children.

Before the Next Session (5 minutes)

Pass out the **Family Activities to Try at Home** and encourage families to select at least one activity they would like to try with their children. Remind families to record their experiences in their journals. You can post a question on chart paper or in the shared virtual space that families could respond to in their journals (e.g., What did you learn about the library?).

Book List

A Library by Nikki Giovanni, illustrated by Erin K. Robinson

This book celebrates libraries as a place to learn, explore and imagine. It follows a little girl to the library where she reads and imagines herself to be many things in many different places. Included is a note from the author, African American poet and writer Nikki Giovanni, about the importance of libraries in her life growing up.

Madeline Finn and the Library Dog by Lisa Papp

Madeline Finn does not like to read, especially in front of her class. She does not think she will ever be a good reader like other kids until she meets Bonnie, the library dog. Reading aloud to Bonnie is not so bad and Bonnie does not mind when she makes mistakes.

Do Not Bring Your Dragon to the Library
by Julie Gassman, illustrated by Andy Elkerton

Have you ever thought about bringing a dragon to the library? Don't! They will cause nothing but trouble. In rhyming verse, this book teaches about library rules and expectations in a fun and silly way.

Lyric McKerrigan, Secret Librarian
by Jacob Sager Weinstein, illustrated by Vera Brosgol

This graphic novel-style book follows the adventures of Lyric McKerrigan, Secret Librarian. She is a superhero who saves the day with the right book at the right time. Can she stop the evil Doctor Glockenspiel from destroying the world's books?



Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library

by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Eric Velasquez

This book of poems and paintings describes the life of Arturo Schomburg, a book collector and curator. He worked to write, research and collect stories that told the Black history of the Diaspora. His large collection was eventually donated to the now famous Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, New York City.

In this video, Carole Boston Weatherford reads selections of the book and shares about how and why she wrote the book.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw-jYcXz-0>

Library Mouse Series by Daniel Kirk

In this series of books, Sam the mouse lives at the library and loves to read all kinds of books after it closes. He decides to write and illustrate stories of his own and add them to the library's collection. When children and the librarian discover his books, they all want to meet the author!

Family Activities to Try at Home

Check It Out!

Visit your local library with your child and check out one of the books from the session book lists. Read it together, stopping and wondering out loud as you read. Encourage your child to explore the other books at the library and select a book they would like to take home to read together.

Explore the Library

Visit your local library or explore their website and find out about events, classes and free passes they offer. Many libraires offer story time, music classes and clubs as well as free passes to children's museums, zoos, aquariums, and art museums. Try one of these with your child or the whole family.

Stop and Wonder

Find chances to stop and wonder when you are with your child. This can be while riding the bus, walking to the store or looking out a window.

"I wonder what that bird is eating?"



"I wonder where that person is biking to?"

"See that woman with the big bag. I think she is carrying a little dog in it."

Ask your child to wonder with you – what do they see? What questions do they have? What do they think might be happening?

Create a Library at Home

Create a home library with books from the book club. Find a small space in your home where you can keep all the session books and any other children's books you have. You could put a pillow or blanket nearby to make it a cozy place to read. Make the library special by naming it after your family or your child – "The Tejada's Library" or "Yadiel's Library."





6

SESSION

The Reading-Writing Connection



Statewide Family
Engagement Center

**GROUP LEADER TIP**

Since this is the last session, consider extending the time and having a small party.

Goals

Families will:

- Connect characteristics of early writing development with characteristics of early reading development.
- Discuss ways to use books to create reading and writing experiences that are engaging for their children.
- Learn strategies for reading aloud.
- Celebrate all they have learned through the Growing Together with Books program.

Session Overview

In this last session, families will discuss the skills and understandings of beginning readers and writers. Families will learn how both reading and writing are developmental processes, and that children's actions that look like "pretend" reading and/or writing are actually demonstrations of important early reading and writing skills. By reading and retelling stories, and encouraging their children to write, families can support their children in becoming stronger readers and writers. At the end of the session, families can share and celebrate all they have accomplished through the program.

Since this is the last session, consider extending the time and having a small party.

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers (optional)
- Computer, projector and screen (optional)
- Materials for Writing Boxes
 - Shoeboxes or other boxes of similar size
 - Materials to decorate boxes (stickers, decorative paper, glue sticks, markers, paint pens, etc.)
 - Materials to put in the writing boxes (See Writing Box Materials List)
 - Copies of Writing Box Materials List



- *Bunny Cakes* (one copy per family)
- Copies of handouts:
 - Book List
 - Family Activities to Try at Home
 - Early Reading Skills and Understandings (optional)
 - Early Writing Skills and Understandings (optional)
- Refreshments for the group (optional)
- Certificates (optional)
- Evaluations (optional)

Recap of Last Week (15 minutes)

Select a couple of the questions below to ask families and have families share their responses with each other.

- What went well?
- What was challenging?
- What was your child's response to the book?
- Would anyone like to share something they recorded in their journal?
- Share something that surprised you when reading with your child last week.
- How did it go using last week's strategy?
- Did you use any other strategies?

Topic Talk (20 minutes)

Developmental Skills of Reading and Writing

Share with families that long before children can sit down and read a book, they are developing skills and understandings that prepare them for independent reading. Share and discuss the list of early reading skills and understandings. (You can provide the list as a handout or display the list on chart paper or on a slide projected on a screen.) Emphasize that even though some of these skills may seem like "pretend" reading, they are actually an important part of the process of learning to read. Encourage them to share the ones that they see their own children developing.

Early Reading Skills and Understandings



- Recognizes the front and back of a book.
- Understands that both print and illustrations carry a message.
- Knows how to turn pages.
- Understands that in English we read from left to right, top to bottom.
- Knows the difference between a sentence, word, and letter.
- Knows the names of letters.
- Recognizes the difference between uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Recognizes labels and signs in the environment
- Recognizes punctuation marks (period, question mark, exclamation mark, and comma).
- Points to and names pictures.
- Repeats words, phrases, and sentences from the book.
- Uses the book to retell the story in their own words.
- Engages in reading behaviors appropriate for their age level.

Let families know that children learn many of these skills and understandings from looking at books while being read to.

Just like in reading, when children learn to write, they start with early skills and understandings before developing more complex skills. As with early reading skills, these early writing skills are also important parts of learning to write.

Early Writing Skills and Understandings

- Understands that print carries a message.
- Uses drawings and scribbles to represent written language.
- Uses letter-like forms.
- Uses strings of random letters.
- Labels pictures.
- Understands that a text (book, story, written work, etc.) is about something.
- Thinks about what they want to write.

Learning to read and learning to write develop best together. A child's writing may be just random scribbles at first, but children gradually



learn that writing consists of marks made in rows, that in English writing starts on the left and goes to the right, and that writing is made-up of letters with spaces between words. Print out or use the computer and projector to show families some examples of emergent writing (See links below or search “stages of writing development” on the internet). Discuss which examples look similar to their children’s writing.

- Promoting Preschoolers’ Emergent Writing - <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2017/emergent-writing>
- How We Montessori: The Developmental Stages of Writing - <https://www.howwemontessori.com/how-we-montessori/2021/09/the-developmental-stage-of-writing-symbolicmock-letters-string-of-letters.html>

Tell families that they can support their children’s attempts at writing by letting them have access to a variety of writing materials at home and by praising their attempts. It is also important for children to have access to lots of print materials (books, magazines, cards, labels and signs) and to see their families writing. Ask families to brainstorm and share ideas for activities that help children practice their use of writing. It helps children to have a real purpose to write, so you may want to suggest, if the families haven’t already, letters to relatives or teachers, thank you notes, lists of things to do, shopping lists or signs. You may want to distribute the **Family Activities to Try at Home** at this point as there are a number of good ideas included there as well.

Session Activity (20 minutes)

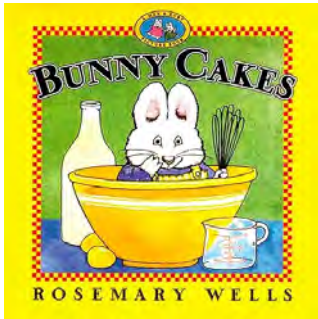
Writing Boxes

To help families get started on plans for creating writing activities at home, and to aid them in making materials more accessible to their children, provide materials for them to create, decorate and begin to fill a Writing Box for their family. Show an example of a finished box - a decorated shoebox filled with writing materials. Share and discuss the Writing Box Materials List which suggests items that might be included. Give each family member a shoebox, materials to decorate the boxes, and a few items to include in it. Allow families time to decorate and then share their creations with the group.



Session Book Read-Aloud (20 minutes)

Bunny Cakes by Rosemary Wells



In this book, Max and Ruby are baking a cake for their grandma. When Ruby sends Max to the grocery store to get more ingredients, Max writes his own ingredients on the list. When the grocer can't read his writing, Max draws a picture of the marshmallow squirters he wants to buy. Model reading the book for families. Draw attention to the grocery lists

that Max and Ruby write. Remind the families that both Max and Ruby are demonstrating different writing skills. Explain to families that this book can be used to start a discussion about writing – the different types of writing, the different purposes. Below are some guiding questions and comments you can use while you are reading the book:

- What did Max write on the grocery list? Why didn't the grocer give Max what he wanted?
- How did Max finally get what he wanted from the grocer?
- Max and Ruby used writing to make a grocery list. What are other ways to use writing?

Max and Ruby used different kinds of writing to share information. Ruby used letters and Max used beginner writing and pictures.

- How did writing help Max and Ruby?

Share that retelling is a strategy that can support both reading and writing. Retelling is when a person reads or listens to a story and then tells it again using their own words. The important parts of the story are included like the setting, characters, and the main events. Children often retell the story while looking at a familiar book independently. Children can be encouraged to retell the story through writing.

Share these retelling prompts with families:

- What happened first, second, last?
- What was the most important part?
- Who were the characters?
- What part did you like the best?





Encourage families to have their children retell the story through talk and writing, reminding families that drawing and/or scribbling is appropriate for many children.

Celebration (15 minutes or more)

Pass out **Family Activities to Try at Home** and encourage families to select at least one activity they would like to try with their children. Encourage families to continue the use of their journal as they continue reading aloud to their children after the program has ended.

Thank the families for their participation. Have them share their experiences in Growing Together with Books. Below are some suggested prompts.

- What did you value about the program?
- What are you proud of?
- How has the program helped you and your children?

Celebrate the families for all their hard work by distributing certificates of achievement or other tokens of recognition. If you are using an evaluation, explain the purpose and the process for completion.

If possible, enjoy some special, celebratory refreshments!

Book List

Bunny Cakes by Rosemary Wells

Max and Ruby are baking cakes for their grandma's birthday. Max spills ingredients and Ruby sends him to the grocery store to get more. Max tries to add "Red-Hot Marshmallow Squirters" to the shopping list, but the grocer can't read his scribbles. When Max finally draws a picture of the marshmallow squirters on the list, he gets what he wants.

Dear Annie by Judith Caseley

Annie and her grandfather have been pen pals since the day she was born. When she was a baby, her mother read and wrote the letters for Annie, but now that she is older, she is able to read and write them herself.



Dear Mr. Blueberry by Simon James

During summer vacation, Emily finds a whale living in her backyard pond, so she writes to her teacher for help. Mr. Blueberry gently explains to Emily why there couldn't be a whale in her pond, but as they write back and forth, both Emily and Mr. Blueberry learn new things about whales and life.

Harold And the Purple Crayon by Crockett Johnson

In this classic story, Harold uses his magic purple crayon to draw a world full of exciting adventures.

Regina's Big Mistake by Marissa Moss

Regina is afraid to make a mistake during art class, but by working hard and trying her best, she learns that even mistakes can turn into works of art!

The Perfect Gift by Mary Newell DePalma

Bird is taking a beautiful berry to her grandma, but it accidentally falls into the river. Bird's friends try to help her get it back, but it is eaten by a crocodile. Bird and her friends decide to write a book about their adventure as a gift to grandma.

Can I Be Your Dog? by Troy Cummings

Arfy is a dog who needs a home. He writes letters to people in the neighborhood describing all of his best qualities and asking to be their dog.

A Squiggly Story by Andrew Larsen, illustrated by Mike Lowery
Andrew wants to write a story but doesn't know many letters. His sister helps and encourages him, and Andrew learns that anyone can write a story, even if it a "squiggly" one.

Also An Octopus by Maggie Tokuda Hall, illustrated by Benji Davis

A story may start with nothing but add an octopus playing a ukulele, and the story takes off through many surprising and exciting twists and turns. This book shows the imaginative process of creating a story.





Author: A True Story by Helen Lester

Helen Lester, an author of many popular children's books, shares her experiences from struggling student to successful author. Her story encourages students to persevere through challenges both personal and professional.

Idea Jar by Adan Lehrhaupt, illustrated by Deb Pilutti

Students save their ideas in an idea jar, and use these ideas in many ways to tell, draw or write stories. One student describes how ideas in the jar can be used together to make an exciting and creative story.

Early Reading Skills and Understandings

A child:

- Recognizes the front and back of a book.
- Understands that both print and illustrations carry a message.
- Knows how to turn pages.
- Understands that in English we read from left to right, top to bottom.
- Knows the difference between a sentence, word, and letter.
- Knows the names of letters.
- Recognizes the difference between uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Recognizes labels and signs in the environment.
- Recognizes punctuation marks (period, question mark, exclamation mark, and comma).
- Points to and names pictures.
- Repeats words, phrases, and sentences from the book.
- Uses the book to retell the story in their own words.
- Engages in reading behaviors appropriate for their age level.





Early Writing Skills and Understandings

A child:

- Understands that print carries a message.
- Uses drawings and scribbles to represent written language.
- Uses letter-like forms.
- Uses strings of random letters.
- Labels pictures.
- Understands that a text (book, story, written work, etc.) is about something.
- Thinks about what they want to write.

Writing Box Materials List

- Pencils, colored pencils
- Erasers
- Markers
- Pens
- Crayons
- Tape
- Glue stick
- Scissors
- Notepads
- Sticky notes
- Index cards
- Paper (all sizes, shapes, and colors; lined and unlined)
- Envelopes
- Greeting cards
- Postcards
- Blank booklets
- Small whiteboard and dry-erase markers
- Stickers
- Alphabet chart
- Anything that will inspire your children to write!!



Family Activities to Try at Home

Retelling Stories Through Writing

After reading a story, have children retell it through talk, drawing and writing. You can even fold or draw lines on a piece of paper for different parts of the story. After the child is finished, ask them to tell you what they wrote.

Lists

Encourage children to write all types of lists - a grocery list of their favorite foods, a list of people in their family, a list of their favorite animals, a "To Do" list, etc.

Make a Family Mailbox

Decorate a box and put a slit in the front and an opening in the back. Use three by five cards that they have decorated or postcards to write notes to each other. The children can take turns delivering the family mail.

Card Factory

Provide materials and encouragement for children to make their own cards for birthdays, thank you notes, Valentine's Day, and other special holidays. You can save old cards that your family has received for the children to cut up and use to illustrate their own. This works great for gift tags too.

Pen Pals

Match your children up with an older relative, friend or neighbor who would love to have a young pen pal. Even a toddler can send pictures.

Make a Great Workspace

Put a blackboard, marker, board, or even big sheets of paper up on the wall in a place where it's safe for kids to write. Put paper on the refrigerator with big magnets. Makes for easy cleanup - even with paint.

Make Handwriting Fun

Write in shaving cream; use chalk on the sidewalk; write on big sheets of paper - anything out of the ordinary can be motivating for children!





Make Your Own Books

Encourage children to create books with illustrations. They can write about anything they want - stories, non-fiction, how-to books, list books, an experience they had! Use paper and a stapler or tape to make books or search online for how to make simple folded books for children.

Easy Fold Mini Books -

<https://www.undercoverclassroom.com/easy-fold-mini-books/>

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