

Don't be Scared, It's Just an Early Literacy Fair!

Ideas for Early Literacy Fun

For the basis of our Early Literacy Fairs, we used the skills covered in Every Child Ready to Read 2. Using the skills of talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing, we created stations that provided a variety of activities that fit each skill. Due to Mid-Continent Public Library's wide range of coverage, our branches serve vastly different demographics. With that in mind, the activities we provided combined items easily created with supplies found at home along with interactive early literacy tools that were purchased.

Talking Station

Purchased Items

Giant Sight & Sound Tubes and Search & Find Alphabet Bags

- * Lakeshorelearning.com

Puppets - to act out and tell stories

- * Area stores occasionally carry inexpensive puppets
- * Lakeshorelearning.com

Lower Cost Options

Sensory Boxes - Fingerplays and Rhymes

- * Decorate a shoe box (*or other small box*) with words to a fingerplay or rhyme on the removable lid.
- * Place items inside that go with the rhyme (*Ex: "Three Little Froggies Go Hop" might have 3 little plastic frogs or even photos of frogs inside*).

I Spy Bottles

- * Plastic bottles (*empty water or other sturdy kind*)
- * Fill plastic bottle (*up to about an inch or so from the top*) with dry rice, beans, or beads AND a variety of items to "spy". NOTE: Rice can be dyed with food coloring and vinegar by placing all ingredients in a container with a lid and shaking until color is thoroughly mixed (*1/2 tsp. white vinegar for each cup of rice; add drops of food coloring*). Then, spread out the rice on a paper towel on a baking sheet and leave to air dry for a couple of days before use.
- * Take a photo of the items that you plan to place inside the bottle. Print out and attach to a tag on the bottle so everyone knows what to look for!
- * Use hot glue and/or duct tape to secure the lid. We did both to be safe.
- * This will be a fun activity that will prompt a lot of "talking" about the treasures that are found inside!

Sensory "Tubes"

- * You will need: empty plastic bottles - feathers, small jingle bells, rice, beans, poms, colorful plastic straws cut into shorter pieces, etc. to place in the bottles. Hot glue and tape lids closed!
- * Talk to the children about the sights and sounds that these create (*bells make a different sound than feathers or straws would make*).

Create a Story

- * Use die-cuts, construction paper, crayons, glue, paints, etc. to have the child create a picture story.
- * Then, talk with them about their stories.

Writing Station

Purchased Items

Trace and Write letters

- * [Highscope.org](https://www.highscope.org)

Alphabet and Number Dough Stampers

- * [Lakeshorelearning.com](https://www.lakeshorelearning.com)

ABC's and 123's Plastic Cookie Cutters Set

- * Hobby Lobby had some for a great price! We use these with the Play Dough.

Play Dough

- * Wheat and gluten free dough is available at [Lakeshorelearning.com](https://www.lakeshorelearning.com) for any children that may need that option. Otherwise, play dough is available in many stores.

Lacing Card Set

- * [Lakeshorelearning.com](https://www.lakeshorelearning.com)

I Know My Letters, Numbers and Shapes Stencil Box

- * [Lakeshorelearning.com](https://www.lakeshorelearning.com)

Lower Cost Options

Making Letters with Play Dough

- * Print alphabet letters on paper.
- * Laminate or cover with sheet protectors or contact paper.
- * Children can use as a guide when forming letters with play dough.

Sensory Gel Pad

- * You will need: large (*gallon sized*) Ziploc bag, large container of hair gel (*\$1 at local dollar stores*), and duct tape. If you use clear hair gel and want to color it, you can use food coloring. Glitter is also a fun option.
- * Combine the hair gel, food coloring, glitter in the Ziploc bag.
- * Gently press all of the extra air out of the bag, then close the bag.
- * Lay the bag down, and carefully press the gel away from the edges of the bag toward the center.
- * Use large pieces of duct tape to reinforce the edges and create a border around the bag.
- * Children use their fingers to practice writing.

Letter Rubbings

- * Use hot glue to write letters and/or shapes on cardstock paper or pieces of cardboard. Let dry.
- * Place a blank sheet of paper over the cardstock.
- * Use old crayons (*with all of the paper peeled off*) to rub across the paper to reveal the letter or shape.

Salt Writing

- * Table salt, sand, etc.
- * Put about an inch layer in a plastic storage container.
- * Children provide the little fingers to write with!

Fishing for Letters

- * Kids plastic swimming pool or large buckets (*no water*)
- * Fishing rods (*paint sticks with string; tie magnets on the end*)
- * Fish shapes (*die-cuts or cut them out*) with letters printed on them; tape a metal paper clip to the fish.
- * Let the child "fish" for letters, then talk about what they have reeled in!

Singing Station

Purchased Items

Rhythm Sticks

- * Kindermusik.com - 7" ABC Rhythm Sticks

Shakers

- * Musiciansfriend.com - LP Chick-Itas

Tambourines

- * Kaplanco.com - Mini Jambourines

Activity Scarves

- * Lakeshorelearning.com

iPads

Lower Cost Options

Sensory Boxes - Songs

- * Decorate a shoe box or other small box with words to a song on the removable lid.
- * Place instruments inside to use while singing the song.

Toilet Paper Roll Shakers

- * You will need to collect some empty toilet paper rolls.
- * Fill them with beads, beans, rice....whatever rattles!
- * Duct tape to completely cover both ends and middle (*cut a circle out of the duct tape and place on tape where it will cover the openings so that the contents do not stick to the tape!*).
- * Have children decorate with stickers if you have some on hand.

Paper Plate Tambourines

- * Fold paper plate in half, or use 2 whole plates.
- * Decorate!
- * Fill with beads, beans, rice....whatever rattles!
- * Staple plate completely closed so that contents do not fall out.

Scarves

- * Fabric scraps
- * Bandanas
- * Strips of old towels, sheets, etc.
- * Thick, colorful ribbons

Rhythm Sticks

- * New, unsharpened pencils
- * Wooden spoons
- * Wooden dowels
- * Make your own! Buy wooden dowel rods at the hardware store and cut into 5-6" lengths (*shorter sticks can be very helpful when you are working with younger children*). Sometimes they will cut these for you for free if you tell them what they are for (*good luck!*). Take some sand paper and sand them really well to remove any sharp spots. We also recommend that you put a finish on them as well to ensure they can be cleaned easily. Ours have held up very nicely, and should last us a very long time!

Playing Station

Purchased Items

Duplos, Legos and Blocks

- * Available in most stores

Stretchy Band

- * Bearpawcreek.com

Kinetic Sand for Sensory Play

- * Available in stores

Shapes Bean Bag Toss

- * Lakeshorelearning.com

Colors & Shapes Activity Mats

- * Lakeshorelearning.com

Fine Motor Scissors Scoops

- * Lakeshorelearning.com

Lower Cost Options

Sensory Bins - Look and Find Play

- * Small boxes, plastic storage containers, or even as large as a water table.
- * Fill with your choice of the following: water soluble packing peanuts, large curly ribbons, dry beans, dry rice, beads, pom pom balls, cotton balls, shredded paper, buttons, plastic basket grass, etc.
- * Hide fun items inside: rubber ducks, plastic letters, small plastic toys, bugs...

Toddler Cloud Dough

- * To make cloud dough mix in the 1:8 ratio. That is, 1 cup of oil to 8 cups of flour.
- * In a large bowl, mix the vegetable oil and flour with the spoon and masher. Get your hands in there as well!
- * Transfer your dough to a shallow storage container (*a dollar store kitty litter bin would work*) and add spoons, scoops, bowls, cookie cutters and plastic molds.
- * Optional: oil based food coloring or powder food coloring. NOTE: For the coloring you have two options. You can use powdered coloring and mix it in the flour before adding the oil or you can use oil based food coloring and premix it in the oil before adding it to the flour. A little goes a long way! The more you add, the darker the color. Should keep in an airtight container for up to three months. To prevent molding, add cream of tartar.

“Snow”

- * This will feel cool to the touch!
- * Mix one can of shaving cream and approximately one (2 lb.) box of baking soda until the mixture is no longer sticking to your hands.
- * Store in a freezer bag in the refrigerator until time to play!

Sponge Soft Blocks

- * Cut colorful dish sponges into rectangles.
- * Packs of these sponges can be found at dollar stores. Use sponges without scrubbing pads.
- * Children can play and build with the soft “blocks”.

Reading Station

Set up this area to encourage reading and listening to books!

- * A staff member to read to the families that stop by.
- * Encourage families to read together as well.
- * Set board books in baskets or tubs around the area where children can reach them. You may want to set books with paper pages on table tops where older preschoolers and adults can reach them for reading.
- * Provide stuffed animal reading buddies.
- * Alphabet floor mats, blankets or quilts are great for families to sit on while reading together!

Early Literacy Fun for Babies

Set up this area in a separate space where babies can safely play with their caregivers. It is important to encourage caregivers to interact with their little ones!

Ideas to set the stage:

- * Clean blankets, quilts, and/or floor mats to play on.
- * Books with board pages - some of the best choices show pictures of real babies, animals, other items (*ball, tractor, toy*) with one or two pictures on each page. Touch and feel books, and books with simple nursery rhymes are great as well!
- * Signage with lap rhymes and other activity suggestions for caregivers to do with their babies (*5 skills*).

Purchased Items

Baby Mirrors

- * Discountschoolsuppy.com - 2 in 1 mirrors

See Inside Activity Ball

- * Lakeshorelearning.com

Baby Puzzles Pack and Baby Shapes Sorter Toys

- * Available at most stores

Bath Time Puppet Mitts

- * Dollar Stores

Lower Cost Options

Baby Container Fun

- * Assorted food storage containers - clear is ideal, but not necessary.
- * Place small baby toys (*links, rings, and teethingers work well*) in the containers and close the lids.
- * Let your babies play with the containers! If they become bored or frustrated, the containers can be opened.
- * This activity is fun with open top containers as well. You can find some great open top containers at dollar stores. Older babies will like taking out the toys and putting them back in.
- * **Baby Water Blob Play** - Babies love to squish, explore and play!
- * 2 freezer bags, duct tape, water, small bath toys (*nothing pointy*) and a towel to set it on (*these can leak a tiny bit*).
- * Double bag your freezer bags to reinforce. Fill with enough water to squish, pushing out excess air.
- * Add a small non-pointy bath toy for more fun! Duct tape around edges of bag to ensure it stays closed.

Literacy Tools Station

This is an area where staff will introduce families to early literacy resources that are available to them through the library.

Early Literacy Information

- * Pamphlets, books, bookmarks about library resources.

Laptops and Computers

- * These can be used to demonstrate the library's early literacy online resources and for families to have hands-on time with them.

AWE Early Literacy Stations

- * Awelearning.com
- * The Early Literacy Station™ (ELS), designed specifically for your youngest patrons ages 2-8, features over 4,000 localized learning activities. The fun, interactive and engaging content spans all seven curricular areas: math, science & nature, social studies & geography, reading, art & music, writing & computer skills, and reference.
- * MCPL purchased these with grant funding.

Remember:

- It's okay to start small!
- You will want to choose staff members that understand early literacy skills, and who are comfortable with interacting and encouraging families to interact with each other.
- Important! Because early literacy includes children from birth to age six years, you will have a variety of items available. If small toys, beans, sand, etc. are involved in an activity, be sure to put them where babies are not likely to reach them. Of course, all activities should be done with adult supervision!
- Inform parents and caregivers if a possible allergen is present (*Ex: the Cloud Dough contains flour*), and have an alternative activity on hand if this is an issue.
- Most importantly, make it a relaxing and fun event for the families attending and for your staff. Everyone will have a great time, and families will leave with skills to continue the early literacy fun at home!

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NOTE: *The activities that are listed in this handout are some that we have purchased or made for use in our own Early Literacy Fairs. The websites are only named to show where we purchased ours, and to give you an idea of what you might want to look for. Many of the sites we used offer coupon deals of free shipping, 40% off sales, etc. We encourage you to shop around for the best deals!*