



Early

Learning & Education PROGRAMS

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A Look at Books

Linda is in the science area watching the fish swim around their aquarium. Next to the aquarium are several books about fish. There are both fiction and nonfiction books such as *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni and *About Fish: A Guide for Children* by Cathryn Sill. On the other side of the aquarium is a poster of fresh water fish. In front of the aquarium are clipboards with paper and pencils. Linda picks up a clipboard and begins to draw. After a few minutes, Linda picks up the book *Swimmy*, turns a few pages, lays the open book down on the table, and continues drawing.



Across the room in the dramatic play area, Eric is standing at the stove stirring a wooden spoon in a pot. A cookbook is propped open on the counter next to the stove and displays a noodle and vegetable dish. There are empty food and drink

containers children might see at home such as corn bread mix and ramen noodles on the shelf. Eric runs a finger down the recipe in the cookbook and looks at the food choices on the shelf. After selecting the ramen noodle box, Eric pours it into the pot and begins to stir, calling out that dinner is almost ready.

Outside under the tree is a tent. Plastic insects are attached to the outside of the tent and there is a sign that says, "Don't bug me, I'm reading." Inside the tent is a large blanket, pillows, stuffed animals, and a basket of books. Samuel is sitting against a pillow, holding a stuffed dog in his lap, reading a book out loud. On the other side of the tree there are two easels with a table between them. There is paper on the easels, as well as paint and paintbrushes. continued on page 4

LITERACY CONNECTIONS: COOKING

Provide children hands-on experiences with what they see in books. For example, combine the following books with cooking activities like making pancakes (See the Recipe section).

- *Applesauce Day* by Lisa J. Amstutz
- *Berry Song* by Michaela Goade
- *Bunny Cakes* by Rosemary Wells
- *Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert
- *Kimchi, Kimchi Every Day* by Erica Kim
- *Little Chef* by Elisabeth Weinberg
- *Magic Ramen: The Story of Momofuku* by Andrea Wang
- *Mama Panya's Pancakes* by Mary Chamberlin
- *Our World of Dumplings* by Francie Dekker
- *Pancakes! Pancakes!* by Eric Carle





Build **Critical Thinking** Skills

Critical thinking skills are important for being able to solve problems, set goals, plan, experiment, evaluate, analyze information, and understand new concepts. One way to build critical thinking skills is to encourage curiosity. Curiosity fuels a desire to learn and engages children fully in the learning process. A child who is curious will be motivated to learn. Curiosity takes time. Giving children time to explore, think things through, develop ideas, and make discoveries provides them with the opportunity to thoroughly explore and learn. An adult demonstrating enthusiasm and interest when children make discoveries and share their interests encourages the child's continued curiosity.

Adults also need to be patient and give children a chance to solve problems and resolve conflicts on their own. When children become frustrated it can be tempting to step in and solve the problem for them, but children develop critical thinking skills by solving challenges as independently as possible. Adults can model how to stop and take deep breaths when feeling frustrated, and then offer support and encourage critical thinking by asking questions that invite children to reflect on their options. For example, "How can this be fixed?" or "What have you already tried?" Questions such as these help children break a large problem down into smaller pieces that are easier to solve and develop their own solutions.

Another way to build critical thinking skills is to create a Discovery Box. Place scientific tools such as magnifying glasses, bug catchers, binoculars, paint samples, notebooks, pencils, small bags for collecting, measuring tape, and a camera into a box or cart that can be moved indoors or outdoors. Encourage children to be nature explorers and scientists. Invite them to use these tools to investigate their environment in detail. They can draw pictures of their findings, match colors to paint samples, observe animals and plants, and collect items they can use for dramatic play or art. These investigations build children's critical thinking skills by teaching them how to observe, experiment, understand, and appreciate their world.



Vision Screenings

Children are not born with perfect vision. Newborns can see faces or objects that are close to them, but it takes two to three years for their vision to completely develop. Routine eye exams can prevent eye conditions and diseases from permanently damaging a child's vision. An infant's vision is evaluated at birth, and during their well-check visits after birth. A pediatrician will ask about the child's family history and evaluate the infant's ability to track objects and respond to light.

Doctors may begin to use more instruments to check vision when a child is one or two years old. Once children are able to follow instructions and understand questions, the exams require their participation. For example, they may be asked to point to the two boxes with lines or identify an image as clear or blurry. If the pediatrician detects a concern, they will refer the child to an optometrist or ophthalmologist for a more thorough examination. An optometrist is a doctor who examines eyes for conditions that need treatment,

and may prescribe glasses, contact lenses, or eye exercises. An ophthalmologist is a doctor who studies, diagnoses, and treats serious eye conditions or diseases, and can perform surgeries.

Schedule a vision exam immediately if you notice your child is squinting, sensitive to changes in light, complains of headaches, has trouble following an object with their eyes, or if their eyes look unusual. This includes their eyes not lining up or moving together, discolored pupils, or a drooping eyelid. Support the healthy eye development of children by setting limits on screen time, encouraging outdoor play, and engaging children in activities where they practice following objects with their eyes.

Source: The website <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/eyes/Pages/Vision-Screenings.aspx> was referenced in December 2022.



A Look at Books

On the table is a vase of sunflowers and bookstands displaying the books *Vincent's Colors* by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and *Colors in Art* by Sabrina Hahn.

Consider how books are being used in this story to build an interest in reading. Books are available in each learning area, and there is print visible on many of the learning materials as well. The types of books are varied and reflect the children's interests. The books are also displayed attractively next to materials or activities to encourage interest in reading and provide hands-on experiences that are tied to the illustrations and stories. The drawing and painting activities invite children to explore print by creating their own pictures, symbols, or marks.

Combining books with activities can help children understand the many uses of print. For example, the children in this story learn that books can be used to identify animals, cook a meal, tell a story, and inspire art. Add songbooks to the music area, books about construction and architecture to the building area, and books about shapes, sizes, counting, and colors to the math area. Inspire creativity by including story and rhyming books in the reading area, along with storytelling props like puppets or flannel board stories. This provides children the opportunity to retell favorite stories and invites them to create their own.

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).



SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Children who are learning English benefit from mastering their home language. Educators can create a welcoming space where children can feel comfortable using their home language while they begin learning English. Reflect on the children and families in your program. Consider how you can use labels, books, music, and other materials in children's home languages to promote inclusion and language development. What other strategies could you use to include their home languages in daily routines and materials?

As children move through their day, which activities will promote conversations between children, and between children and adults? Conversations create an opportunity for children to practice both English and their home language. These are also opportunities for children to develop empathy as they learn about each other's similarities and differences. How can you create more opportunities for spontaneous conversation during the day?

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).

RECIPES

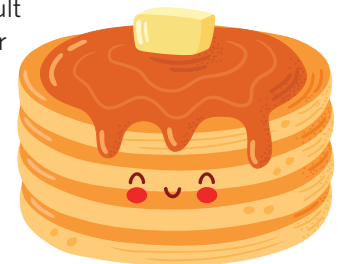
Vegan Pancakes

Use books to introduce children to cooking pancakes, following recipes, and different diet preferences. You can find a book list in the article *Literacy Connections*. Invite children to help make these vegan and gluten-free pancakes. They can add ingredients to a blender, wash fruit, cut fruit with a plastic knife, and set the table. With adult supervision, school-aged children can use a squeeze bottle or measuring cup to pour batter into the skillet and use a spatula to flip pancakes.

Ingredients for four pancakes

- 3 cups gluten-free rolled oats
- 2 1/4 cups unsweetened plant-based milk
- 2 medium overripe bananas
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- Fresh fruit of choice (optional)

Add all ingredients to a blender and blend until smooth. For a thinner batter, add plant-based milk one tablespoon at a time for the desired consistency. Heat a non-stick skillet on medium. Use a 1/3 measuring cup to scoop the batter into the heated skillet. Allow the pancake to cook until bubbles appear around the edges; around three to five minutes. Flip the pancake over and cook it for an additional three minutes until the bottom is browned. Top the pancake with the fresh fruit of your choice and serve.



Spring into Learning with Books

The following books about Spring can be used with activities to extend children's learning.

Activity: *A Little Book about Spring* by Leo Lionni

Age group: Infants

What you need: The book, a mouse finger puppet (optional), and an outdoor space to observe nature.

What you do: Read the book and sing the following *Tiny Mouse* clapping rhyme. Bend your index finger to be the "mouse," or use a mouse finger puppet. *Behind the tree (clap, clap), and under the house (clap, clap), there lived a teeny (clap, clap), tiny mouse (clap, clap). It loved to sing (clap, clap), it loved to tap (clap, clap), but most of all (clap, clap), it loved to clap (clap, clap). It clapped all night (clap, clap), it clapped all day (clap, clap), it clapped to frighten (clap, clap) the cat away (clap several times around your body).* When outside, invite infants to gently touch flower petals and leaves, look for birds, or watch clouds. Describe what they see, hear, and feel.

What they learn: Infants observe similarities and differences between pictures in the book and their own outdoor space, hear new vocabulary, practice large motor skills, and interact with their caregiver.

Source: The *Tiny Mouse* was taken from <https://youtu.be/8xBf7jHd7L8> in December 2022.

Activity: *Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert

Age group: Toddlers

What you need: The book, two or three whole vegetables or fruit (washed), a planter or gardening space, soil, water, plastic shovels, and seeds to grow (herbs, carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, strawberries, and zucchini).

What you do: Read the book and place the vegetables and fruit where children can reach them. Supervise closely as toddlers touch, lift, and explore the food. Wash them again, and cut them into small pieces. Invite toddlers to taste them. Be aware of any food allergies and supervise closely to prevent choking. Consider starting a garden of herbs, vegetables, and fruit. Place small herb plants such as basil or mint in larger containers so children can

immediately observe growth, and then invite them to help plant seeds in the garden or container.

What they learn: Children use their motor skills and senses to learn about the weight, size, shape, color, and taste of different vegetables and fruits. They also hear new vocabulary words and begin learning about how food grows.

Activity: *Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt* by Kate Messner

Age group: Preschool

What you need: The book, a large bed sheet or tarp, bug catchers, magnifying glasses, white paper, and pencils.

What you do: Read the book and discuss the bugs and insects that help gardens grow. Go for a nature walk to look for bugs and insects to observe. Invite children to help spread the sheet out around the base of a bush and gently shake the branches.

Then pull the sheet out to see what insects may have fallen down from the bush. Gently place a few in the bug catchers for children to observe closely, before returning them to the bush. Ask children to draw sketches of the bugs and insects they observed. You can also take photos to create a matching game or photo book.

What they learn: Children learn the physical characteristics of bugs and insects, where they like to live, and how they affect the growth of food. They also practice writing skills by drawing pictures.



Spring into Learning with Books

Activity: *Fletcher and the Springtime Blossoms*
by Julia Rawlinson

Age group: School Age

What you need: The book, white construction paper, watercolor paints and brushes, vase with real or plastic cherry blossoms, cotton balls, straws, and masking tape.

What you do: Read the book and invite children to paint the blossoms you have placed in a vase. Then place the cotton balls on one end of the floor and use the tape to make a finish line on the other end. Give each child a straw and invite them to race their cotton ball "blossoms" to the finish line. Talk about how the air in their lungs moved the cotton balls the way the wind in the book moved the blossoms. Discuss their other observations about wind.

What they learn: Children practice observation and fine motor skills through painting. They also explore the properties,

causes, and effects of wind by blowing cotton balls, discussing the book, and observing nature.



ABOUT CHS

For over 130 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at www.chs-ca.org.

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