

Early Learning & Education PROGRAMS

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How to be a Storyteller

The children are playing when they notice Ms. Julie walk to the cupboard and pull out a tote bag. The bag is bright blue with pictures of sea animals all over it. As Ms. Julie walks towards the carpet area, children ask each other, "What is in her bag?" and they move to the carpet where Ms. Julie is sitting with her bag in her lap, putting her hair in a ponytail so the children can see her clownfish earrings. As the children sit down around her, Ms. Julie asks, "What will we be talking about today?" Children immediately call out, "Fish! The ocean!" Then Ms. Julie says, "What makes you think we might be talking about fish or the ocean today?" Ms. Julie smiles as the children point to her and the bag, saying, "Your

earrings! The tote bag!" Ms. Julie says, "You are right!"

Ms. Julie pulls out a book, points to the top, and says, "The title of this book is *Commotion in the Ocean*, and the author's name is Giles Andreae. Before we start to read, I want to give you each a piece of the story so you can help me tell it." She pulls out stick puppets of different sea animals that appear in the story and begins to hand one to each child, asking them to say the name of their animal as they take the puppet.

Ms. Julie explains that when they hear their animal's name in the story their job is to hold up their puppet and move it like that animal.



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ONLINE RESOURCES

When researching information online, consider the following tips:

- **What is the source?** Check the website domain name to see if it is an accredited university, government agency, or nationally recognized organization.
- **Who is the author?** Look for authors experienced in teaching who hold degrees in childhood development or education from accredited schools.
- **How current is it?** Look for unbiased information that was published in the last five years.
- **Is the information appropriate?** All materials and activities must be safe and comply with Community Care Licensing regulations.
- **What do your colleagues think?** Talk to other educators whose opinions you respect.



What Can We Do with a Book?

Books offer endless opportunities for learning. They tell stories, but they also teach children about emotions, friendship, math, science, history, and the world around them. Providing children with access to a wide variety of written materials supports their understanding of the different purposes of printing and helps them experience different writing styles. In addition to books, consider adding items like the sports pages of the newspaper, paper maps, and magazines for children (High Five, National Geographic for Little Kids, or Ranger Rick Jr.) to your reading area. Place cookbooks in the housekeeping area, field guides about plants and animals in the science area, and music books with instruments to show children how all subjects have books.

Use books to help children develop critical thinking and deductive reasoning skills. For example, pause at different points in a story and ask children what they think will happen next and why. Ask children, "If you could write a different ending to this story, what would you write?" Once children are familiar with the book, try telling the story backward. Start by saying, "This is how the story ended. What happened just before this?" Continue until children work their way back to the first page of the story. This helps them develop the ability to understand the sequence of events in a story. If the book talks about emotions or friendships, try asking children to label the emotion and discuss what they would do if they felt that way.

Challenge children to look through a book and count how many times they see the first letter of their name, or to find a toy in the room that is the same color or shape as one in a book. Use a familiar book about animals to practice grouping similar and different objects. Ask children to identify the animals that fly, crawl, swim, run, or that have fur, scales, or feathers. Books are full of entertaining stories, but they are also useful tools for learning.



Healthy Eating Habits

Children learn about making healthy food choices from their families and caregivers. By role modeling healthy eating habits and serving children a variety of vegetables, fruits, lean meats, dairy, and other proteins, we show them what portion sizes and healthy meals look like. More importantly, eating healthy food develops their palate, which is the ability to appreciate different tastes and flavors. The palate that children develop will guide their food preferences for a lifetime. For more information about nutrition, read the Children's Home Society of California brochure, *Nutrition: Healthy Eating for Healthy Children*, online at <https://chs-ca.org/resources/educational-publications>.

Offer cooking activities on a regular basis to introduce children to new foods and give them the opportunity to develop independence by preparing their own food. Start with simple recipes that do not require heat, such as a fruit or vegetable smoothie. Be mindful of potential food allergies and always supervise cooking activities closely. Children can

wash produce, use plastic knives to cut them into large pieces, remove seeds, and add them to the blender. Children can also spread peanut butter on celery and top it with raisins, make a simple salad, peel hard-boiled eggs, build a sandwich, or spoon yogurt onto a plate with some fresh fruit or veggies for dipping. For more activity ideas, try the book *Cooking is Cool: Heat-Free Recipes for Kids to Cook* by Marianne E. Dambra.

When you routinely involve children in cooking activities it encourages them to take an interest in their own health and well-being. Teaching them simple recipes for healthy snacks, and including them in the preparation of meals, shows them that they have the ability to manage their own health. For more information about nutrition and kid-friendly recipes, visit the website <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/center/fitness-nutrition-center.html>.



How to be a Storyteller

She begins to read the book, changing her voice for each animal and using gestures. After the story Ms. Julie claps and praises the children for knowing when to hold up their puppet. She then invites the children to “swim” their puppet back to her so she can put them away until next time.

The next book Ms. Julie pulls out is *Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister. She also takes out flannel pieces she has made to go with the story. “I am going to give each of you a piece of the story, and you can put it on the flannel board when the story tells us about it.” She then passes out the pieces, introduces the books as she did before, and begins to read. The children smile as they place their pieces on the board and clap at the end of the story. They end story time by singing the song “Slippery Fish” and then return to play.

Ms. Julie does a variety of things to encourage interest in story time. Using different tote bags is one way to get children’s attention, as they will wonder what is in the bag. Using articles of clothing or accessories to give hints about the stories children are going to hear is another way to promote their curiosity. During the stories, Ms. Julie did more than read the books. She engaged the children by using props, and her animated tone of voice and gestures brought the stories to life. This is why Ms. Julie is a storyteller.

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



CONNECTING LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Creating connections between concepts and actually using knowledge makes learning more integrated and meaningful for children. Children can make signs for block buildings or write down orders and read menus in the dramatic play area. This practical use of literacy in all areas supports children as they begin to understand that spoken words can be written, and written words can be spoken. This is key to children mastering skills and building a foundation for the next level of learning.

Consider your own learning environment and how you share information with parents about child development.

- How do you make literacy visible?
- How do you make connections between reading and language in daily activities?
- Can you think of ways to create similar connections between home and school?
- How do you encourage families to explore and practice language and literacy at home?

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

RECIPES

Sweet Corn Ice Pops

This recipe makes ten ice pops you can store in the freezer as a treat on a warm day. You will need a saucepan, blender, and either ice-pop molds or paper cups with ice-pop sticks.

Ingredients

- 2 cups low-fat milk or dairy substitute
- 4 ears sweet corn
- 1 cup nonfat plain Greek yogurt
- 1/4 cup agave syrup or honey
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 pinch salt

Directions

1. Remove the kernels from the corn and keep the corn cobs. In a medium saucepan, heat the milk, corn, and corn cobs over medium heat until the mixture is bubbly.
2. Turn the heat down to low and simmer for 20 minutes. Then remove the saucepan from the heat and let it cool for about 10 minutes. Discard the cobs. Use a slotted spoon to remove about 1 cup of the kernels and set them aside.
3. In a blender, combine the remaining corn and milk mixture with the yogurt, agave syrup, vanilla, and salt. Puree until smooth. Add the reserved corn and pulse one time on low.
4. Freeze in ice-pop molds or in small paper cups with ice-pop sticks for at least 10 hours before serving.



Fun with Words

Support children's development and learning with these fun language and literacy activities.

Activity: Animal Houses

Age group: Infants

What you need: The words to this rhyme.

What you do: Familiarize yourself with the words and actions of the rhyme. Next, place infants where they can easily see you so that they can connect what they hear with what they see. Say the following rhyme, and make the gestures noted in parentheses. *Here is a nest for robin* (cup hands together), *here is a hive for bees* (make fists and press the fingers of one fist against the other), *here is a hole for bunny* (make a circle with thumb and fingers), *and here is a home for me* (steeple fingers together)! Repeat the rhyme often over time to give infants an opportunity to become more familiar with the words and actions.

What they learn: Infants are introduced to new vocabulary and rhyming words. They also practice motor development as they participate in gestures that help make the vocabulary meaningful.

What they learn: Adapted from *Growing Up Wild: Exploring Nature with Young Children Ages 3 to 7* by Project Wild (Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, 2020) in April 2026.

Activity: Did You Ever See a Sea Animal?

Age group: Toddlers

What you need: The words to this song. The song is sung to the tune of *Did You Ever See a Lassie?* As you sing, invite children to join in and move like each animal.

What you do: Gather children together to sing the following song. Start by singing one verse and add additional verses as long as children are interested. *Did you ever see a fishy, a fishy, a fishy? Did you ever see a fishy swim this way and that* (move like a fish)? *Swim this way*

and that way, swim this way and that way; did you ever see a fishy swim this way and that? Other verses can include a jellyfish that floats, a clam that snaps, a seagull (gull) that flies, or an octopus that wiggles.

What they learn: Toddlers learn the names of sea animals and how to describe their movements as they also practice motor development. Combine this song with books about the ocean or other ocean activities to extend learning.

Source: Adapted from *Growing Up Wild: Exploring Nature with Young Children Ages 3 to 7* by Project Wild (Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, 2020) in April 2026.

Activity:

Playdough Stories

Age group: Preschool

What you need:

Small sticks or the blunt ends of thin paintbrushes for making marks, and playdough or air-dry clay.

Optional: A device that allows children to watch a short video from National Geographic Kids about rock art that can be found at <https://youtu.be/SQwe9qf8qro>.

What you do: Talk to children about how people once told stories about their lives by carving pictures, called petroglyphs, into the walls of rock caves. If appropriate for your program, show children the optional video noted above, which allows them to see what they look like. Invite them to create their own picture stories by rolling out playdough and etching pictures into it using small sticks or the blunt end of a thin paintbrush.

What they learn: Children learn about how symbols and pictures are a part of language and create their own stories. They also practice fine motor skills that help prepare them for writing.



Fun with Words

Activity: Children’s Newspaper

Age group: School Age

What you need: One or two newspapers, large (11x14) sheets of white paper, pencils, and markers.

What you do: Show children the newspaper and walk through the different parts of a newspaper together and discuss the content. Point out that there are news reports and feature articles (detailed story of one event), an editorial page (opinion stories), letters to the editor, as well as sports, business, advertisement, comics, international, and lifestyle or entertainment pages. Point out headlines (titles), bylines (author information), photos, and captions. Invite children to publish their own newspapers to add to the reading area. They can create individual newspapers or work together as a group to make one.

What they learn: Children learn about the different parts of a newspaper and the style of writing that goes with each section. They also practice fine motor skills, writing, organizing, and learn how to share their ideas.



ABOUT CHS

For 134 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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