

Supporting Language and Literacy Through Play and Conversations



We know that strong language skills and a love of literacy enhance almost every single learning domain for children. With language and literacy expectations for children entering Kindergarten higher than ever, FunShine® is here to help.

The foundation of language and literacy is oral language. Providing language-rich experiences where children encounter more sophisticated vocabulary will help develop a child's understanding of language and ability to learn and use new vocabulary. These experiences can be provided by simply talking to a child about his day, describing what you see out the window, or even describing what you are doing while making a snack or lunch. Sharing picture books and talking about the text and pictures as you read supports the development of oral language and a child's ability to comprehend what is heard.

The activities in the Fireflies® curriculum are written to help teachers foster language and literacy development, with many provided prompts and questions to ask. However, language and literacy development takes place all throughout the day with every activity, conversation, game, etc. a child encounters. The ideas provided in Fireflies® activities are written to get you started. Then you can incorporate some of the ideas below to help language and literacy development continue to grow.

Below are additional ways you can foster language and literacy development throughout your day, organized by activity type. This is not an extensive list, but it should help you become more aware of opportunities to help children develop language and literacy. Don't forget to enlist the help of parents and families to help build language and literacy skills.

Ideas for Supporting Language and Literacy Through Play and Conversations

Drop-off Time:

- Ask a child about her evening/morning/weekend; listen and ask clarifying questions about what she said.
- Talk about an event you know a child experienced recently; ask her to tell you about the best part.
- Talk about an upcoming event; ask her to tell you what she expects to happen.
- Ask about a pet or sibling.
- Ask about the weather conditions and see whether she would like to share her observations during weather time.

Center Time

- Encourage children to act out stories they hear in the dramatic play area using pictures and props.
- Look for opportunities to start conversations. (Why do you think the wood is floating? Tell me about the book you are holding. How did you make that pretty orange paint color? Who/what are you pretending to be? What do you think a "father" does during the day?)
- Talk to children about what they are doing; talk about what you see children doing. (Join the block center play and ask, "What are you building with blocks?" Join the writing center and ask, "Tell me about what you're writing.")
- Provide opportunities for children to "write" and "read" in various learning centers. (Play restaurant and ask a child to take your order/bring you the bill; play school and ask a child to be a teacher and write things on a dry erase board, etc.)
- Provide picture books with no words in the reading center and encourage children to "read" them to you or one another by using the pictures to tell the story. (The *Carl* series by Alexandra Day is a great example of wordless picture books.)
- Provide magnetic letters and trays for letter exploration in the writing center. (Play a game. Ask children to find the first letter in their name. Ask, "What sound does that letter make? Can you name another word that begins with that sound? Which letter do you hear at the beginning of the name D-D-D-Devyn? Find that letter on the tray." Encourage a child to ask a friend to find a letter to extend the game.)
- Provide a large variety of books and print materials for children to read to one another (fiction, nonfiction, nursery rhymes, poetry, cookbooks, etc.) in the reading center.

Playtime

- Play word games and share word riddles. (I am an animal. I have four legs. I live on a farm. I give milk. What am I?)
- Play alphabet games and clapping games identifying syllables in words.
- Encourage alphabet knowledge by offering sidewalk chalk or squirt bottles for children to practice writing letters on fences, sidewalks, etc.
- Encourage a child to explain the rules of a game to another child.

Supporting Language and Literacy Through Play and Conversations



Conversations in the Classroom

- Ask guiding questions to help children learn and use vocabulary for new concepts. (Count two sets and talk about *more*, *less*, and *equal*. Name two opposites and ask the child to name the opposite of another word.)
- Speak slowly and use sign language as you speak to increase understanding of new words.
- Allow plenty of time for children to tell a story during large group time.
- Ask children to tell about what they learned at the end of the day. (Get them started with short prompts; What was your favorite part about the pumpkin activity? Why? What did you learn about pumpkins?)

Music and Movement

- Ask questions about music and feelings. (How does this song make you feel? Is it a happy or sad song? Why do you think so? Which song seems happier? Why?)
- Use songs, nursery rhymes, poems, and fingerplays to engage children in language and literacy development. (“What word sounds the same as ‘Jill’ in the nursery rhyme Jack and Jill?”) Sing a rhyming song, leaving out a word, and see if children will fill in the blank. (“Five little monkeys jumping on the BED. One fell off and broke his _____!”)
- Encourage children to create movements that go along with the words of a song or rhyme in some way. (Ask why they suggested a particular movement.)
- Sing songs as transitions to let children know you’re changing activities.

Reading Time

- Share repeated readings of the same book, asking different questions and pointing out different things about the book each time (pictures, colors, shapes, parts of a story, author/illustrator/cover/index/table of contents, etc.).
- Ask children to tell you their favorite part of a text and tell why.
- Share a variety of fiction and nonfiction books. (Talk about the difference between fiction and nonfiction, then have children identify whether a book is fiction or nonfiction in the future.)
- Use repetitive stories, and encourage children to repeat those parts with you. (“I’ll huff, and I’ll puff, and I’ll...!”)

Transitions Ideas

- Have children move to the next activity if their first/last name begins with a certain letter/sound.
- Ask children to tell the opposite of a given word.
- Point to a friend whose name begins with a certain letter.
- Clap the syllables in your first name as you say it.
- Say a word that rhymes with “goat” (boat, coat, moat, quote, tote, vote)

Final Tips

- Engage in back-and-forth conversations with each child daily, modeling the rules of conversation (take turns, maintain eye contact, use loud/soft voice as appropriate, ask clarifying questions, etc.).
- Describe people, places, and things in the child’s environment.
- Ask open-ended questions, requiring children to answer with more than just a “yes” or “no.”
- Model using new vocabulary often during the day. (Use words from the Word Wall, Spanish Cards, and more.)
- Maintain a word wall, review words often, and add words/pictures as children show interest.
- Remind parents to use the Fireflies® Monthly Newsletter to help them extend language and literacy activities from school to home.

For more ideas to help you support language and literacy development through play, conversations, and more, please visit our FunShine Blog and search “Language/Literacy.”