

Reading and Writing in the Content Areas

Young children are fascinated by the world around them. Foster independent learning by introducing nonfiction books on topics related to their interests. Nonfiction can provide learning and literacy experiences in every curriculum area, and at all developmental levels.

The Teacher's Role

Here are some ways you can enhance acts of literacy and use informational books with every child in your room.

- Make nonfiction books available daily. Children may browse through the books, examine the pictures, or study details. With younger children, begin by sharing concept books about numbers, letters, location, or size. Older children can begin to do simple research and write or draw reports.
- Organize your library according to a simple system that children can use independently. For example, you might use different-colored stickers or colored plastic baskets for biographies, math books, or books on topics such as dinosaurs or sea animals.
- Journals, data sheets, and pencils in the science and math areas allow children to conduct investigations and record observations and results.
- Children sometimes have difficulty selecting topics when writing stories. List children's names on chart paper and encourage each child to name an interest. Record contributions and post the chart for easy reference.
- Observe and listen to conversations during activity time. Ask yourself: *What do my children want to learn?*



What structures are they building in the block area? What books are they reading? You can base a study or project on the interests you observe.

- Study authors who write informational books. Tana Hoban, Alike, Franklin Branley, Gail Gibbons, and Ann Morris are a few children's nonfiction writers. After reading several titles by an author, encourage children to notice her or his writing and illustration styles.

Literacy Activities

Dictionary of Names Children can learn to recognize alphabet letters by making a class dictionary. Have children examine several picture dictionaries. Then start a book, writing each alphabet letter on a separate page. Invite children to find the first letter in their name and draw a self-portrait under that letter. Able writers can print their names. If you have a computer, children can use Kid Pix to draw themselves and print their names! Bind the dictionary and place it in the reading area.

Dinosaur Dig! Children can pretend to be scientists and dig for dinosaur

bones. Involve parents by asking for donations of cleaned and dried chicken or turkey bones. Hide the bones in the indoor or outdoor sandbox. On sentence strips, write simple clues: *Look in the sandbox. Dig with your hands. What do you feel?* You can read, tape-record, or have early readers read the clues to the class.

Heroes' Stories Reading stories about people and places in the past can make historical figures real and interesting. Read aloud stories of famous Americans. Then list a few important facts on chart paper. Provide a U.S. map and encourage children to locate the hero's birthplace.

Take a Poll! Conduct a weekly math survey. Provide clipboards, pencils, paper, and a list of classmates. Invite two children each week to ask classmates questions, tally responses, and count totals or make graphs.

Questions might include: *What is your favorite dinosaur? Do you have brown, blue, or hazel eyes?* Make the survey records into a book for children to read in the math area.

Encourage children to become interested and able readers and writers by providing high-quality, exciting nonfiction books on a variety of topics. Watch your children as they plant questioning seeds, then nurture and develop those inquiries with literacy activities.

—Lynn Cohen

Lynn Cohen is a kindergarten teacher in the Great Neck Schools (NY), author, and consultant.

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

BOOKS

- *A Dinosaur Named After Me* by Bernard Most (Harcourt Brace). Children share facts about their favorite dinosaurs.
- *Dinosaur Roar!* by H and P Stickland (Dutton, January Firefly selection).
- *I'm Tyrannosaurus: A Book of Dinosaur Rhymes* by Jean Marzollo (Scholastic). A book of simple four-line poems children can

learn easily.

- *El dinosaurio que vivía en mi patio* by B. J. Hennessy (Scholastic). What it might be like if we could bring back the dinosaurs!
- *Dinosaur Story* by Joanna Cole (Scholastic). All about dinosaurs: Where they lived, what they ate, and how they protected themselves.
- *Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King!* by Jean Marzollo (Scholastic). In Spanish: *Feliz cumpleaños, Martin*

Luther King. King's life and work, simply told.

- *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles (Scholastic). The story of one of the first black children to attend an all white elementary school.

VIDEOCASSETTE

- *I Dig Fossils* (Mazon Productions). Scott and his Dad take viewers on a real fossil hunt near home. Lists resource books for fossil hunters!