

Arkansas Imagination Library: Building the Reading Brain

Month: September

Book: The Very Hungry Caterpillar's First Signs

Age Group: Birth – 12 Months

Arkansas Infant/Toddler Early Learning Standards

SE1.1 Forms trusting relationships with nurturing adults

SE2.1 Experiences, expresses, and regulates a range of emotions

SE3.1 Shows awareness of self as a unique individual.

CD1.1 Shows curiosity and a willingness to try new things

CD3.1 Uses reasoning and planning ahead to solve problems and reach goals

PH1.3 Demonstrates gross-motor manipulative skills

PH2.2 Adjusts grasp and coordinates movements to use tools

LD1.1. Understands and responds to language (in child's home language)

LD2.1. Uses increasingly complex vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure (in child's home language)

EL1.1 Shows interest in literacy experiences

EL1.2 Engages in read-alouds and conversations about books and stories

EL2.1 Notices and manipulates the sounds of language

Science of Reading Foundations

- Serve-and-return interactions
- oral language exposure
- shared attention
- vocabulary development
- responsive communication
- gestures paired with language
- meaningful conversations with caring adults
- Sign language enhances language pathways by pairing movement, visual representation, and spoken language.

Learning Goals

Language & Literacy: Increase receptive and expressive vocabulary through signs, pictures, songs, and repeated reading. Encourage communication through gestures, signs, sounds, and words.

Social-Emotional Development: Strengthen confidence as children communicate needs and ideas through signs and interactions.

Cognitive Development: Build understanding of symbols, pictures, and cause-and-effect communication.

Physical Development: Develop fine motor coordination through sign language movements, fingerplays, and hands-on exploration.

Start with the book:

Reading to toddler group

Create a cozy environment where you can gather children with varying mobility abilities, from crawling to walking. Sit down with the group of children, understanding that at this stage many are engaged in parallel play and may not interact with one another. Toddlers will also get up and then rejoining the group at times. Hold the book at eye level. Take time to show each child the pictures.

Reading to an individual toddler

Gather the toddler onto your lap or in front of you, and let them explore the book by grabbing, turning pages, and lifting flaps. Position the book at the toddler's eye level. Read aloud in an animated voice, asking questions and discussing the images on the page as you go. Stay on the page as long as the toddler is interested, turning the page when the baby gives you a cue that they want to move on to the next page.

Activities to extend learning

Activity Title	Materials Needed	Instructions	Domains of Development/ Learning Standard	Why
Make a play meal Use the sign for eat while role-playing	Play food, pretend kitchen setting	Use the sign for eat while role-playing, making a meal and "eating" it	Social-Emotional Development Cognitive Development Physical Development (fine) Language & Literacy	Role-play activities give toddlers the chance to demonstrate and explore their world.
Stack Blocks Use the More sign when you add a block.	Play blocks or recycled food boxes	Use the More sign when you add a block to the tower.	Cognitive Development Physical Development (fine) Language & Literacy	Action supports building vocabulary through movement. Adding "more" blocks to the tower and using the sign increases the vocabulary awareness
Paint some milk Use the sign for milk as you paint a cup of milk.	Black paper with white crayon "cup" outline, white paint	Have children paint white paint in the cup while using the sign for milk.	Cognitive Development Physical Development (fine) Language & Literacy	Working with paint and filling the cup with "milk" gives children an opportunity to develop fine motor skills.
Role play with baby dolls.	Play baby dolls and baby doll accessories.	While role-playing with baby dolls, use the signs for mommy and daddy.	Social-Emotional Development Cognitive Development	Role-play activities give toddlers the chance to

Use the sign for Mommy and Daddy.			Social-Emotional Development Physical Development (fine) Language & Literacy	demonstrate and explore their world.
Pick up "all done" Use the sign "all done" when picking up after an activity.	none	After each of these activities finish with saying all done in sign language	Cognitive Development Social-Emotional Development Physical Development (fine) Language & Literacy	Action supports building vocabulary through movement.
Sign Cards Circle time	Sign Cards	Make cards for the signs and work on the signs during circle time.	Cognitive Development Physical Development (fine) Language & Literacy	Action supports building vocabulary through movement.
Ask for Help Use the sign as you ask a child to help you pick up.	none	Use the sign as you ask a child to help you pick up.	Cognitive Development Social-Emotional Development Physical Development (fine) Language & Literacy	Action supports building vocabulary through movement.

Teacher Reflection and Review

Which signs were most meaningful to children?

How did sign language influence participation and communication?

Which activities generated the strongest language interactions?

What modifications could strengthen engagement for future lessons?

Differentiation

For Children with Language Delays or Limited Verbal Skills

Representation:

- Provide a communication board with bedtime pictures and words
- Use visual schedules throughout activities
- Offer audio version of the book
- Use high-contrast, large print materials

Action & Expression:

- Provide a communication board for each activity
- Offer hand-over-hand guidance
- Allow children to show understanding through actions rather than words
- Use Velcro or magnetic pieces instead of glue for easier manipulation

Engagement:

- Offer frequent breaks
- Use preferred sensory items (favorite blanket, stuffed animal)
- Create a calm, low-pressure environment
- Celebrate all attempts at participation

For Children with Fine Motor Challenges

Representation:

- Use step-by-step picture guides
- Label materials clearly

Action & Expression:

- Provide glue sticks instead of liquid glue
- Offer adaptive scissors or request teacher assistance
- Use larger crayons and markers
- Provide tape instead of glue for some activities
- Use Velcro dots for easier manipulation
- Offer hand-over-hand guidance
- Allow children to direct an adult who does the fine motor work

Engagement:

- Offer choices in materials and methods
- Provide frequent breaks
- Use preferred sensory items
- Create a pressure-free environment

For Children with Gross Motor Challenges

Representation:

- Use visual cues and picture schedules
- Provide clear, simple instructions

Action & Expression:

- Offer modified versions of movements (smaller range of motion)
- Provide support (wall, furniture, adult hand) for balance
- Use props (scarves, ribbons) to make movements easier
- Allow children to direct an adult who performs movements
- Offer alternative ways to participate (pointing, vocalizing)

Engagement:

- Provide a comfortable, safe space
- Offer frequent breaks
- Use preferred sensory items
- Create a judgment-free environment

For Children with Sensory Sensitivities

Representation:

- Provide visual schedules to prepare for transitions
- Use clear, simple language
- Offer choices to increase sense of control
- Provide different textures to explore (soft blankets, smooth foam, satin ribbon)
- Allow children to opt out of activities
- Offer sensory breaks with preferred items

Engagement:

- Use a warm, gentle tone
- Offer choices and control
- Respect sensory preferences
- Provide a safe space to retreat if overwhelmed
- Use weighted blankets or compression items if helpful
- Limit transitions and provide advance notice
- Use calming music and soft lighting

For Advanced Learners

Representation:

- Introduce related concepts (sleep cycles, dreams, different bedtime routines around the world)
- Use more detailed illustrations and books
- Introduce written words alongside pictures

Action & Expression:

- Ask children to explain why each step is important
- Invite children to create new movements or songs
- Encourage detailed descriptions and storytelling
- Ask children to help teach peers

Engagement:

- Offer leadership opportunities
- Encourage problem-solving
- Ask higher-level thinking questions
- Provide opportunities for independent exploration

For Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Representation:

- Provide consistent, predictable routines
- Use clear, literal language
- Offer advance notice of transitions
- Use social stories about bedtime routines
- Provide visual supports for all instructions

Action & Expression:

- Provide a communication board
- Offer choices to increase sense of control
- Allow repetition of preferred activities
- Provide sensory breaks as needed
- Use visual timers for transitions
- Offer hand-over-hand guidance if helpful

Engagement:

- Use consistent routines and expectations
- Respect special interests and incorporate them when possible
- Provide a safe space to retreat if overwhelmed
- Use preferred sensory items

- Celebrate small successes
- Build relationships gradually

For Children with Hearing Impairments

Representation:

- Provide sign language or visual demonstrations
- Use written words alongside pictures
- Ensure good lighting for lip reading
- Use visual schedules
- Provide captions or transcripts for audio materials

Action & Expression:

- Provide a communication board with pictures and words
- Use gestures and facial expressions
- Allow children to use sign language or preferred communication method

Engagement:

- Use visual attention-getters (lights, hand signals)
- Provide one-on-one support as needed
- Use visual rewards and celebrations
- Create a visually rich environment

For Children with Vision Impairments

Representation:

- Use high-contrast colors (black on white, white on black)
- Provide tactile materials (textured fabric, 3D shapes)
- Use verbal descriptions of pictures and activities
- Provide audio version of the book
- Use real objects alongside pictures

Action & Expression:

- Use hand-over-hand guidance
- Offer verbal instructions and descriptions
- Allow children to touch and manipulate objects
- Use audio communication boards

Engagement:

- Use a warm, descriptive tone
- Celebrate participation
- Create a safe, familiar environment

- Use preferred sensory items
- Provide frequent verbal feedback

Assistive Technology and Accommodations

Visual Supports:

- High-contrast printed materials
- Large print books and vocabulary cards
- Visual timer for transitions
- Picture communication board

Auditory Supports:

- Lullaby recordings
- White noise machine
- Noise-reducing headphones
- Visual cues paired with verbal instructions

Tactile Supports:

- Weighted blanket
- Soft sensory items (stress ball, fidget toy)
- 3D foam shapes
- Real objects (pillow, blanket, toothbrush)

Communication Supports:

- AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) device if available
- Sign language or visual demonstrations
- Gesture and facial expression

Motor Supports:

- Chunky crayons and markers
- Velcro dots for easier manipulation
- Pre-cut and pre-torn materials
- Tape instead of glue
- Hand-over-hand guidance
- Adaptive utensils

Sensory Supports:

- Soft, calming music
- Scented items (lavender sachet)
- Weighted items
- Comfortable seating options

- Quiet space for breaks

Notes for Teachers

Creating a Calm Environment:

- Play gentle background music
- Keep the space uncluttered and organized
- Use soft furnishings (carpet, cushions, blankets)
- Maintain a warm, gentle tone of voice

Supporting Transitions:

- Use a visual timer
- Use a consistent transition signal (soft bell, song)
- Offer choices when possible
- Celebrate successful transitions

Managing Behavior:

- Use positive reinforcement
- Provide sensory breaks as needed
- Offer choices to increase sense of control
- Use a calm, patient approach

Individualizing Instruction:

- Adjust activities based on individual needs
- Provide one-on-one support as needed
- Celebrate individual progress
- Communicate with families about home strategies

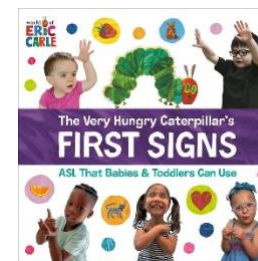
Extending Learning:

- routines at home
 - Provide take-home materials (vocabulary cards, activity sheets)
 - Suggest related books and activities



Family Connection

September 2026



Reading to your Child: 12 Months - 24 Months:

Reading is a "serve and return" interaction. This back-and-forth process is fundamental to brain wiring, especially in the earliest years. Serve-and-return interactions help parents create a safe, secure environment for infants and help young children recognize they're being cared for and understood.

- Read with joy and excitement. Use different voices for different characters.
- Stay on a page for as long as your baby is interested. Turn the page or stop reading when your baby looks away, seems tired, or seems bored.
- Ask questions your child can answer by pointing. You can say, "Where's the doggie?" or "Where's the happy baby?" or "Who says meow?"
- Speaking in short, slow sentences and waiting for your child to take a turn in the conversation helps him understand.
- Let your toddler give a picture a name; then add a comment like: "Yes, a plane! The plane is flying. The plane is flying in the sky."
- Help your child pretend to be a character in a book. You can pretend to feed a baby or be puppies, barking and running after each other.

Extend the book by trying these activities:			
Play-Based Activity Title	Materials Needed	Instructions	Why?
Build a "More "tower.	Play blocks or recycled food boxes	Use the More sign when you add a block to the tower.	Action supports building vocabulary through movement.
Role-play eating and use signs: eat, more, all done.	Play food, pretend kitchen setting	Use the sign for eat while role-playing, making a meal and "eating" it	Role-play activities give toddlers the chance to demonstrate and explore their world.
Help me; use the sign help as you clean up after play.	none	Use the sign as you ask a child to help you pick up.	Action supports building vocabulary through movement.
Add the following activities to your daily routine:			
Daily Routine Activity	Instruction	Helpful Tips	
Mealtime: Use mealtime signs Eat more, all done, thank you, and milk.	Use mealtime signs Eat more. All done. Thank you, milk.	Encourage child to make the signs with you	Action supports building vocabulary through movement.
Bedtime Routine: Use the signs Mom, Dad, love, sleep, help, milk	Use the signs Mom, Dad, love, sleep, help, milk	Encourage child to make the signs with you	Action supports building vocabulary through movement.

Assessment for Parents

Use this checklist to observe and record your toddlers responses during sensory, music, and literacy activities. Mark what you notice during play-based activities at home.

Social and Emotional Development

- ☐ Seeks comfort from familiar adults; uses them as a secure base to explore
- ☐ Shows preferences for familiar people; may show separation protest that eases with reassurance
- ☐ Engages in simple social games (peek-a-boo, chase) and back-and-forth interactions
- ☐ Begins parallel play near other children; watches, imitates peers
- ☐ Shows a range of emotions; starts to use simple strategies to calm with adult support
- ☐ Begins to assert self (e.g., "mine," resists at times) while responding to consistent limits

Approaches to Learning (Attention, Persistence, Curiosity)

- ☐ Explores new toys/objects; tries different ways to make things happen
- ☐ Returns to an activity after brief interruptions; persists briefly on simple tasks
- ☐ Imitates adult actions during play; uses "trial and error" to solve simple problems
- ☐ Shows emerging ability to follow simple routines and transitions with support

Cognitive Development

- ☐ Understands simple cause-and-effect (push button → sound; drop toy → adult picks up)
- ☐ Matches or sorts by one attribute with support (e.g., puts shapes in sorter, stacks rings)
- ☐ Engages in early pretend play (feeds doll, "talks" on phone) that becomes more purposeful by 24 months
- ☐ Finds hidden objects; remembers where favorite items are kept

Language Development (Receptive and Expressive)

- ☐ Follows simple one-step directions (e.g., "Give me the ball," "Come here")

- ☐ Points to familiar people, objects, and some body parts when asked
- ☐ Uses gestures plus sounds/words to communicate wants
- ☐ By 18–24 months, uses at least 10–50 words and begins to combine two words (e.g., "more milk")
- ☐ Imitates new words; names familiar people/objects; uses simple pronouns near 24 months

Emergent Literacy

- ☐ Enjoys shared book time; brings books to adult; attends briefly to stories
- ☐ Points to and names familiar pictures in books
- ☐ Scribbles with crayons/markers; makes purposeful marks
- ☐ Turns board-book pages (several at a time early on; closer to one at a time by 24 months)

Fine Motor/Self-Help

- ☐ Uses pincer grasp to pick up small items; places objects into/out of containers
- ☐ Stacks 2–4 blocks; places shapes in simple sorter with growing accuracy
- ☐ Uses spoon with some spills; drinks from open cup with help
- ☐ Assists with dressing (offers arm/foot; attempts to remove simple clothing)

Social Studies

- ☐ Recognizes familiar routines, places, and people; anticipates what comes next
- ☐ Shows awareness of family roles (imitates chores, helps "clean up")

Creativity and Aesthetics

- ☐ Enjoys music and movement; bounces/dances to rhythm
- ☐ Engages in simple art exploration (finger paint, crayons); enjoys cause-and-effect of materials
- ☐ Uses pretend objects (spoon as microphone) with growing imagination

Family Connection Activity

Play-Based Activity Title	Materials Needed	Instructions	Why?
Role-play eating and use signs: eat, more, all done.	Play food, pretend kitchen setting	Use the sign for eat while role-playing, making a meal and "eating" it	Role-play activities give toddlers the chance to demonstrate and explore their world.

Prepare by gathering play food and play food accessories (pots, pans, utensils, etc.). Have enough for each family group. Start by demonstrating the signs, showing caregivers where they are located in the book so they can refer back to them. Encourage parents to play with their toddlers by using the sign eat, then asking for more with the sign for more, and lastly using the sign for all done and playing like they are full. Repeat as the toddler's attention persists.