ARKANSAS IMAGINATION LIBRARY

Building the Reading Brain

Birth–5 Teacher Guide & Family Literacy Activities

Every Arkansas Imagination Library book is an opportunity to build the reading brain. This guide provides developmentally appropriate, play-based learning experiences aligned with the Arkansas Early Learning Standards to strengthen language, literacy, and school readiness through meaningful interactions with books.

A World to Meet by Katie Harnett

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Group 1 • 0-12 Months

Arkansas Infant/Toddler Early Learning Standards

SE1.1 Develops secure relationships with caregivers.
LD1.1 Attends and responds to language.
EL1.1 Shows interest in books, pictures, and songs.
CD1.1 Demonstrates curiosity and exploration.
PD1.1 Uses developing motor skills to explore.

Science of Reading Foundations

- Serve-and-return interactions
- oral language exposure
- shared attention
- vocabulary development
- nursery rhymes, songs, repetition
- responsive communication

Learning Goals

- Strengthen attachment
- Build receptive language
- support sensory exploration
- Encourage attention to books
- communication.

Start with the book:

Reading to an infant group:

Create a cozy environment where non-mobile infants can lean against you, another adult, or a soft surface in the room, and where infants who can sit can do so securely. Position the book at an infant's eye level. Read aloud in an animated voice, asking questions and discussing the images on the page as you go. Allow each child to touch the book or even help by lifting the flaps.

Reading to an individual infant:

Gather the infant in your lap and allow them to explore the book by grabbing, turning pages, and lifting the flaps. Position the book where it is at an infant'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 for as long as the infant is interested, turning the page when the baby gives you an indication 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
Naming things	Book	Name each item you see on the page. Do this along with the words on the page. Point out items around the room that match the images in the book.	Language and Emergent Literacy	In this action, building vocabulary can develop as the infant is exposed to language in the book and then makes connections to the world.
This is big, big This is small, small	Book mirror	Talk about big and small things in the book on each page and then say the rhyme listed below in front of a mirror with the child on your lap This is big big big Hold (arms out to side) This is small small small (cup hands together) This is short short short (hold hands with palms facing each other) This is tall tall tall (reach one hand above head) This is fast fast fast (circle fists quickly)	Language and Emergent Literacy Cognitive Development	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development.

		This is slow slow slow (circle fists slowly) This is yes yes yes (nod) This is no no no (shake head)		
Rattle Shake and Music Making	Book Rattles	Gather rattles and noisemakers from around the room and, either in a group with all the infants or one-on-one, talk about all the sounds you can make.	Cognitive Development Physical Development (fine)	These actions connect words to sensations and keep your infant engaged through multiple senses.
If you're happy and you know it	Book Mirror	Position your infant where they can see themselves in a safe, unbreakable mirror. Sing If you're happy and you know it with actions. Exaggerate the words, allowing the infant to see your face.	Social Emotional	This activity supports language development and helps infants begin to understand themselves as separate people.
Bubble Pop with scarves	Book Scarves	Sing song: One little red fish swimming in the water, swimming in the water, swimming in the water. One little red fish swimming in the water, bubble, bubble, pop. (Hands make fish motion of swimming in the water, make bubbles that float to the top, clap hands above head) Two little blue fish swimming in the water, swimming in the water, swimming in the water. Two little blue fish swimming in the water, bubble, bubble, pop. Three little yellow fish swimming in the water, swimming in the water, swimming in the water. Three little yellow fish swimming in the water, bubble, bubble, pop. Use a scarf as a fish, using colors that match, instead of clapping through the scarf up and let it fall.	Cognitive Development Language and Emergent Literacy	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development.

Wave, clap and peek-a-boo	Book Scarves	Take your hands, Wave hello How are you? Take your hands, Wave hello How are you? Take your hands, Wave hello How are you? How are you today? Take your hands, Clap along With me. Take your hands, Clap along With me. Take your hands, Clap along With me. Take your hands, Hide away, Peek a boo! Take your hands, Hide away, Peek a boo! Take your hands, Hide away, Peek a boo! Peek a boo to you and you!	Cognitive Development Language and Emergent Literacy	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development.
Bounce and Roll	Ball	Take a ball and roll it toward the baby. Let the baby inspect and touch it, and push the ball back towards you. When the infant becomes uninterested, take the ball and roll it to the next infant. While you roll the ball, talk about the ball: the color, texture, and size.	Physical Development (gross)(fine) Language and Emergent Literacy	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development. The action of catching and pushing the ball develops motor skills.

Teacher Reflection and Review

What captured infants' attention? Which interactions supported language development and attachment? How did infants respond to sensory experiences?

Differentiation

Follow infant cues and developmental levels. Provide visual, auditory, tactile, and movement-based supports. Adapt interactions to individual needs.

https://app.briskteaching.com/student_podcast/4ijfll6pfe

Sensory Supports for Different Infant Needs

For Infants Who Prefer Gentle, Quiet Sensory Input

Use soft, muted colors or pastels instead of bright colors. Speak in a calm, quiet voice. Move scarves and objects slowly and gently. Use light touch on skin rather than firm pressure. Offer one color or object at a time instead of many. Provide longer pauses between activities. Use soft music or quiet singing. Limit the number of people or sounds in the environment.

For Infants Who Prefer More Stimulation and Movement

Use bright, bold colors. Use a more animated, expressive voice with varied tone. Move scarves and objects quickly and playfully. Offer bouncing, rocking, or swaying movements. Introduce multiple colors and objects together. Use clapping, singing, or rhythmic music. Encourage reaching and grabbing. Offer more frequent changes between activities.

For Infants with Limited Mobility or Motor Skills

Position the infant comfortably where they can see and reach objects without strain. Bring colored objects closer to the infant's face or to the infant's hands. Use lightweight scarves and soft toys that are easy to hold. Offer hand-over-hand support for reaching or touching. Use mirrors positioned at eye level. Provide verbal descriptions of colors and movements. Celebrate small movements like eye tracking or finger movements.

For Infants Who Are Sensitive to Textures

Offer one texture at a time. Start with the softest materials (like silk scarves). Let the infant explore at their own pace without pressure to touch. Describe textures as you show them: "This is soft and smooth." Respect the infant's decision if the infant does not want to touch something. Offer visual exploration (looking) without requiring touch. Use gloves or your hand as a barrier if needed. Gradually introduce new textures over time.

For Infants Who Are Overstimulated Easily

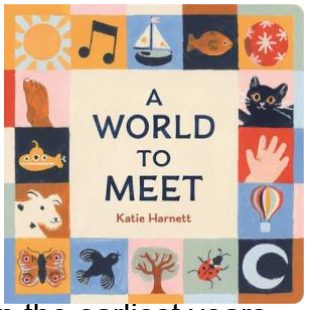
Reduce background noise and visual clutter. Use one color at a time rather than a rainbow. Dim bright lights if possible. Offer shorter activity sessions (5–10 minutes). Provide quiet breaks between activities. Use a calm, soft voice. Minimize the number of people present. Offer a safe space to retreat if needed. Watch for signs of stress (crying, turning away) and pause activities.

For Infants with Visual Differences or Preferences

Use high-contrast colors (like black and white) if bright colors are hard to see. Position objects within the infant's visual field. Move objects slowly and deliberately. Use sound cues along with visual cues: "Listen to the rattle! Now look at the red rattle!" Describe colors and objects in detail. Use tactile exploration (touch and texture) as the main way to explore. Offer objects at different distances to find the infant's preferred viewing distance.

Family Connection

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Reading to your Child: Birth -12 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 infants recognize they're being cared for and understood.

- Help your baby explore the book. Let your baby turn the pages, grab, or even chew on it.
- 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?"

Extend the book by trying these activities:			
Play-Based Activity Title	Materials Needed	Instructions	Why?
This is the way the animal moves Baby Bounce	none	This is the way the bunny hops: hop, hop, hop, hop. This is the way the horsey trots: trit trot, trit trot. This is the way the froggy jumps: jump, jump, jump, jump. This is the way the birdie flies: fly away, fly away!	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development.
Open shut them Finger play	none	Open, shut them Open, shut them Give a little clap, clap, clap Open, shut them Open, shut them Put them in your lap Creep them, crawl them Creep them, crawl them Right up to your chin	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development.

		Open wide your little mouth... But do not let them in.	
Bounce and Roll a ball	ball	Take a ball and roll it toward the baby. Let the baby inspect and touch it, and push the ball back towards you. While you roll the ball, talk about the ball: the color, texture, and size.	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development. The action of catching and pushing the ball develops motor skills.
Add the following activities to your daily routine:			
Daily Routine Activity	Instruction	Helpful Tips	
Tummy Time	Use the book that has high-contrast images as an object for your baby to focus on	Having high-contrast images located in a book in front of a baby during tummy time introduces written language and words.	This activity builds vocabulary and strengthens your connection through shared attention.
Diaper routine	Add this rhyme to diaper time (To the tune of Frere Jacques) Changing diaper, changing diaper Lots of fun, lots of fun You're no longer stinky, you're no longer stinky Nice clean bum, nice clean bum	Singing during diaper changes helps calm an infant during a time of transition.	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development.

Assessment for Parents

Observe eye contact, visual tracking, engagement, vocalizations, reaching, smiling, and responses to shared reading.

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

Language and Vocalization

- ☐ Makes sounds in response to your voice or singing
- ☐ Babbles or coos during activities
- ☐ Attempts to imitate sounds you make
- ☐ Responds to their name
- ☐ Makes new sounds or babbles not heard before

Eye Contact and Visual Tracking

- ☐ Makes eye contact with you during activities
- ☐ Follows colorful objects with their eyes
- ☐ Looks at pictures when you point
- ☐ Tracks movement across their visual field
- ☐ Focuses on your face during singing or talking

Engagement and Attention

- ☐ Stays interested in the activity for 5+ minutes
- ☐ Looks at you for encouragement or response
- ☐ Smiles or shows joy during activities
- ☐ Reaches toward objects or materials
- ☐ Shows excitement through body movements

Sensory Responses

- ☐ Touches or grasps offered textures
- ☐ Reacts to different colors (looks longer, reaches)
- ☐ Responds to music or rhythmic sounds
- ☐ Explores objects by mouthing (if age-appropriate)
- ☐ Shows preference for certain textures or colors

Motor Skills and Movement

- ☐ Reaches for objects or scarves
- ☐ Grasps items placed in their hand
- ☐ Moves arms or legs to music
- ☐ Bounces or sways when held during songs
- ☐ Rolls or shifts position to see better

Attachment and Responsiveness

- ☐ Seeks comfort from you during activities
- ☐ Responds positively to your voice
- ☐ Shows distress when you leave and happiness when you return
- ☐ Calms down when you hold or comfort them
- ☐ Initiates interaction by reaching or vocalizing

Family Connection Activity:

Bounce and Roll a ball	Ball	Take a ball and roll it toward the baby. Let the baby inspect and touch it, and push the ball back towards you. While you roll the ball, talk about the ball: the color, texture, and size.	This activity makes cognitive connections between actions and words, enhancing language development. The action of catching and pushing the ball develops motor skills.

Prepare by having a ball for each family. Demonstrate the actions listed in the chart above. Talk enthusiastically about the ball and express excitement as your infant interacts with it. Focus on explaining why this simple activity is important for your baby. Give ways to change up the activity if the child cannot sit up, such as rolling the ball toward a mirror or wall, allowing the ball to hit the wall and come back while the infant is in a caretaker's lap.

References

Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards: Birth through 60 Months. (2016). Arkansas Department of Education and Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office. https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Files/AR-Early-Learning-Standards-2016-1_20230505102527.pdf

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