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INTRODUCTION

A child's language skills undergo a major "construction period" during the early years of learning. Children develop their listening skills, increase their vocabulary, and begin to make the transition from oral to written language. *Building Better Language Skills* gives you all of the tools and plans you need to provide opportunities for children to build their language skills. This book covers the four areas of language—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—in fun, open-ended ways that are meaningful and relevant to children.

FOUR AREAS OF LANGUAGE

The games and activities in this book give children many opportunities to explore ways of receiving and expressing both oral and written language.

Listening



Children learn to listen to language long before they are able to produce it. The activities in this section promote the development of listening skills as children follow verbal directions and respond through movement and speech to what they hear. Children will also develop other skills, such as color and shape recognition and identification, counting, and problem solving, as they participate in these fascinating, cross-curricular activities that involve active listening.

Speaking



Every early-childhood teacher knows that speaking is one of children's favorite forms of communication! Implement the activities in this section to help children correctly pronounce words, build vocabulary, speak in complete sentences, improve fluency, and develop other oral language skills that will help them become effective speakers.

Reading



Reading is a complicated process that first requires mastery of a series of basic skills. Use the activities in this section to help children recognize and identify letter and word patterns, identify and produce phonemic sounds (phonemic awareness), utilize picture clues, and match phonemic sounds to the letters of the alphabet that represent them (phonics). Children will love these inviting, hands-on activities that promote successful reading.

Writing



Reading and writing go hand in hand. As children develop the skills they need to decode printed words, they become interested in encoding in written language their own thoughts and ideas. The activities in this section allow for every level of writing ability in your class—from scribbling to drawing to printing the alphabet. Encourage children to record information and give directions through written language as they participate in the shared-writing activities.

Choose from 55 phonemic awareness, phonics, math, shape and color, movement, and critical-thinking games and activities that encourage children to follow directions, use simple sentences in sequential order, identify and generate rhymes, respond to oral and written language, discriminate sounds, problem-solve, and more. These cross-curricular activities and extension ideas also teach children to retain, recall, and share information; expand their knowledge of language; and increase their enjoyment of learning new concepts.

Copy on card stock several sets of the reproducible letter cards (pages 65–67), number cards (pages 68–69), and picture cards (pages 82–85). Cut apart the cards, laminate them, and keep them handy for use in many of the games and activities in this book.

Building Better Language Skills will help you provide early-childhood and English-as-a-second-language children with authentic, significant experiences that balance their interests and needs. The activities are easy to implement and feature fun, flexible, and concrete experiences that will help children build a strong foundation for language development.

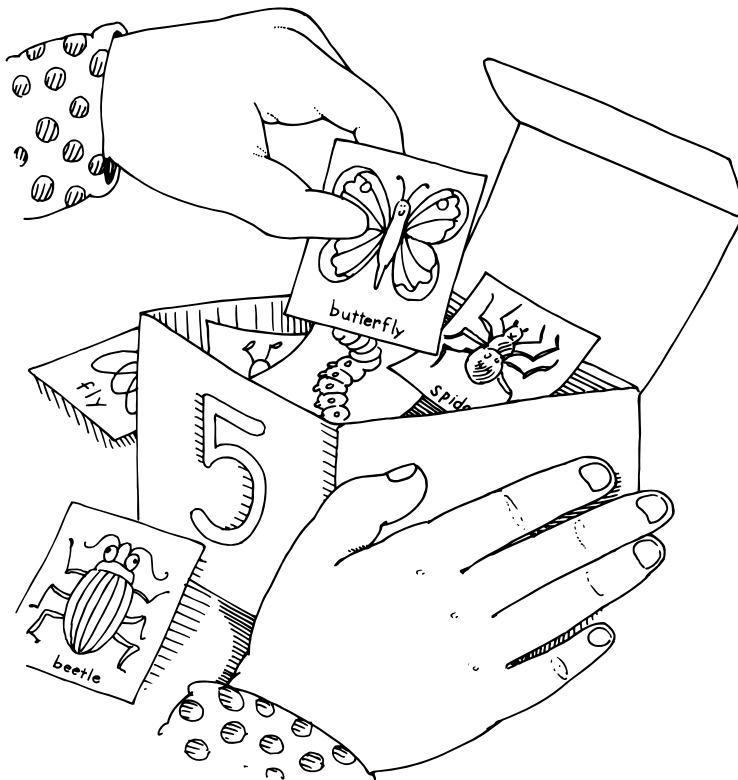


BUGS IN THE BOX



Make several copies of the Bugs reproducible, color the bugs, and cut apart the cards. (Or, use a bag of plastic bugs.) Number the boxes from 1 to 10. Place

the boxes in random order on a flat surface, and ask a small group of children to arrange them in numerical order. Set a container of the paper bugs or plastic bugs beside the boxes. Point to a box and say *How many bugs belong in this box?* Invite a child to place into the box the number of bugs that matches the number on the box. Repeat the process with another child until all of the boxes have been filled. Then, replace the bugs in the container, and repeat the activity with a different group of children.



Materials

- ✓ Bugs reproducible (page 62) or plastic bugs
- ✓ crayons or markers
- ✓ scissors
- ✓ 10 small boxes without lids
- ✓ container

Concepts

- Following directions
- Number recognition
- Numerical order
- Counting

Extensions

- Encourage children to give each other the directions in the activity.
- Read aloud one of David A. Carter's bug books before you begin the activity. Then, invite children to use construction paper and art supplies to make their own bugs to place in the boxes.

Materials

- ✓ Cookies reproducible (page 63)
- ✓ card stock
- ✓ crayons or markers
- ✓ scissors
- ✓ dried black beans
- ✓ glue
- ✓ paper plates

Concepts

- Following directions
- Counting
- Addition

Extensions

- Place at a learning center a set of cookie cutouts with one to six beans glued on separate ones, and invite children to find two cookies that create a sum you name. For example, children could pick up the cookies with three and five beans to make the sum eight.
- Read aloud *The Doorbell Rang* by Pat Hutchins (Greenwillow). Combine several sets of cookie cutouts, and use them to demonstrate how the cookies are divided in the story.

COOKIE COUNTING



Give each child a card-stock copy of the Cookies reproducible, and ask children to color and cut out their cookies. Give each child 21 black beans. Ask children to glue one bean on the first cookie, two beans on the second cookie, and so forth. Divide the class into pairs, and give them simple directions to follow, such as *Find a cookie that has two "raisins" on it* or *Find a cookie that shows your age*. Or, invite pairs of children to give each other directions, such as *Find two cookies that have five "chocolate chips" together*. After the activity, invite children to glue their cookies to a paper plate and then take home their goodies to "share."

