
BACK TO BASICS

Books and the library center

Books and related library center activities are the keystone of language and literacy development. The library center—also called the book center or language center—encourages and supports children as they decode squiggles and lines into meaningful print. The library is a place for discovery and investigation, discussion and evaluation, curiosity and satisfaction.

Use these guidelines as you set up and maintain your classroom library.

Building and managing the library

- Position the library in a quiet, well-lit area of the classroom. Make the space cozy with low shelves, a rug, comfortable chairs, and floor pillows. Make sure there is enough room for children to browse through the shelves while making selections.
- Display books neatly and attractively. Consider grouping fiction and nonfiction books separately, shelving books alphabetically, or arranging them

by topic to make selection easier and to introduce proper library classification.

DISPLAY BOOKS NEATLY AND ATTRACTIVELY.

- Rotate books regularly. Give children access to books you own and those you borrow from a library. For your ease and efficiency, consider tagging classroom books with short strips of colored tape at the bottom of the book's spine (blue tape for books about animals, orange for books about families, for example). Help children learn to identify categories and help them distinguish between borrowed books from the library and those that



are always available in your classroom. Include books that complement a current project or unit of study, and those that focus on a topic of particular interest to the children.

- Teach children how to care for books. Encourage children to wash hands before handling books, turn the pages gently, and store books properly in their designated places. Model the best way to hold a book so that the spine isn't damaged and the pages aren't torn or folded.
- Share books with enthusiasm. If you sound as though reading is a chore, children will regard it as such. On the other hand, let the text speak with its own voice; non-fiction sounds different from poetry. Save over-the-top dramatic reading for the stage.

TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO CARE FOR BOOKS.

- Make sure your library includes books that depict a variety of cultures and ethnic groups in positive ways.
- Collect and share a variety of literacy materials including books, magazines, recorded books, maps, and charts. Provide developmentally appropriate writing tools—lined paper, pencils, markers, colored pencils, and notepads—at a desk with child-sized chairs.
- Check books often for needed repairs. Remove damaged books until repairs are made.
- If you are beginning to build a classroom library, ask a children's librarian to recommend books to buy. Look for books that have been awarded the Caldecott Medal for exceptional illustrations. Maintain a list of desired books and make the list available to families who want to buy and donate new books (to celebrate their child's birthday or other special event, for example) or who might spot bargains at a local bookstore or garage sale.

Basic books for classroom libraries

Both fiction and nonfiction books will make your library center rich and satisfying. The most basic

early care and education library includes these categories.

- Nonfiction concept books that give children information about the real world. Strive for books with photographs or realistic illustrations rather than cartoons, and make sure the text is accurate and vocabulary accessible to the children.
- Poetry books that help children hear and repeat rhymes. Include a collection of Mother Goose rhymes and books that invite children to recite along with your reading.
- Wordless books that allow children to make up a story that corresponds to the book's pictures. These books build vocabulary, language fluency, and logic.
- Predictable books that encourage children to repeat sequences and anticipate story action.
- Picture books with text appropriate to the ages and developmental levels of the children in the group. Make sure to include class favorites as well as new publications. Pay attention both to the text style and the illustrations to make sure there is variety.
- Longer chapter books that encourage older children to relax and imagine as you read aloud. When you read a chapter a day, you encourage children to remember and recap the story's action and to look forward to the continuing adventure.
- Science magazines with accurate text and informative pictures and labeled illustrations.
- A basic picture dictionary like *Merriam-Webster Children's Dictionary* that includes charts, maps, pronunciation guides, and labeled illustrations (designed for children 6 to 9 years) or the *Scholastic First Picture Dictionary* that includes labeled illustrations organized by category like the city, the body, and nature (designed for children 3 to 5 years). ■