
BACK TO BASICS

Library center

Library center activities are pivotal to a child's language and literacy development. The library center—also called the book or language center—encourages and supports children as they decode squiggles into meaningful print. The library is a place for discovery and investigation, discussion and evaluation, and curiosity and satisfaction.

Use these guidelines to help you develop and maintain a successful library center.

Starting and managing the center

- Position the library in a quiet, well-lit area of the classroom. Make the space cozy with low shelves, a floor rug, comfortable chairs, and floor pillows. Decorate the area with laminated dust covers from some of the children's favorite books.
- Display books neatly and attractively. In a classroom for toddlers and young preschoolers, feature four or five books, rotating the selection daily. Give older preschoolers and school-age children access
- to the whole book collection of the class.
- Separate fiction from nonfiction books. Shelf the fiction alphabetically by author. Help children develop their book-searching skills: Remember the book's author *and* the order of the alphabet. Shelf nonfiction books by category using a modified Dewey Decimal System: general information, philosophy, religion and spirituality, social sciences, language, science (including mathematics), technology, arts, literature, and history (including biographies), and geography.
- If you borrow books from a public library or other source, keep a list of these books (and a due date) and shelf them separately from books you own. Some teachers use special covers or bookmarks with borrowed books.
- Share books with enthusiasm. If you sound as though reading is a chore, children will regard it as such.
- Include books that depict a variety of cultures,



PHOTO BY SUSAN GAETZ

ethnic groups, and family structures in positive ways. Make sure children in the class have opportunities to relate to book characters with lives like their own: adopted, foster children, children with same-sex parents, Asian, Latino, and children with disabilities or developmental delays, for example.

- Collect and share a wide variety of materials including books, magazines, books on tape or disk, charts, atlases, and maps.

- Picture books with text appropriate to the ages and developmental levels of the children in the group
- Longer chapter books that encourage older children to relax and imagine as you read aloud
- Science magazines with accurate text and informative pictures and illustrations
- A basic picture dictionary ■

SHARE BOOKS WITH ENTHUSIASM.

- Teach children how to care for books. Encourage children to wash hands before handling books, to turn pages carefully, and to store books carefully in the designated place.
- Check books for needed repairs and remove damaged books until you can make repairs—or have a volunteer to do so.
- If you're starting your 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. Include titles that complement the standard interests of the children in the group: farm animals, dinosaurs, friends and family, and rhymes, for example.

Basic books for a classroom collection

Both fiction and nonfiction books will make your library center rich and satisfying for its users.

Include these basics:

- Nonfiction concept books that give children information about the real world
- Poetry books that help children hear and repeat rhymes
- Wordless books that invite children to make up the story, improving vocabulary and oral language skills
- Predictable books that encourage children to repeat rhymes and refrains while predicting the words and events that come next