
FEATURE

Houses: Activities for exploration

A web is a house for a spider.
A bird builds its nest in a tree.
There is nothing so snug
as a bug in a rug.
And a house is a house for me!

Mary Ann Hoberman's verse in *A House Is a House for Me* (1978) has been celebrated for decades and holds an invitation for a near-endless list of hands-on activities. After all, everything lives somewhere, and young children are hard-wired to explore the where, why, and how of mouse holes, dog kennels, ant-hills, and pea pods.

Use Hoberman's book—and the other classics listed in the resources—and the activities below to

open doors of curiosity, discovery, and exploration.

Large group activities: Indoors and out

Activities with simple, expansive movements are well suited for large groups of seven or more children. Such activities allow children to display a range of physical abilities while cooperating with others and learning by imitation.

Where do they live?

Use this rhyme to introduce conversations about houses—for people and for animals.

Birds live in nests. (Form small circle with hands)

Fish live in bowls.
(Form larger circle with arms)

Bats live in caves.
(Form larger circle with arms overhead)

Mice live in holes.
(Form tiny circle with fingers)

Chicks live in coops.
(Bend elbows; hold palms flat, shoulders high)

Pigs live in pens.
(Move hands further apart)

Cows live in barns.
(Move hands further apart)

Bears live in dens.
(Form large circle overhead with arms)

PHOTO BY SUSAN GAETZ



Animal houses,
Some big and some small,
(Spread arms wide and then
bring hands close)
For all kinds of animals:
Short, big, or small.
(Squat, stand with arms high,
crouch with tight body)

Animal invaders

Start this rhyme as a story and encourage children to sing along, with actions, as the refrain becomes familiar.

Once upon a time, there was a house. The people who lived in the house had to go away, but they forgot to close the back door. While the people were away, a bunch of animals got together and said, "Let's have some fun."

In came a skunk (Hold nose)
With a pile of junk (Arms out-stretched)
And moved into that house that
wintery day
When the owners were far away.

In came a pig (Puff out cheeks)
With a bag this big. (Curl arms
around a huge bag)
In came a skunk (Hold nose)
With a pile of junk (Arms out-
stretched)
And moved into that house that
wintery day
When the owners were far away.

In came a fox (Tap nose)
With a heavy box. (Lower arms
and grunt to lift)
In came a pig (Puff out cheeks)
With a bag this big. (Curl arms
around a huge bag)
In came a skunk (Hold nose)
With a pile of junk (Arms out-
stretched)

And moved into that house that
wintery day
When the owners were far away.

In came a toad (Stick out tongue
several times)
With another load. (Throw package
over back)
In came a fox (Tap nose)
With a heavy box. (Lower arms
and grunt to lift)
In came a pig (Puff out cheeks)
With a bag this big. (Curl arms
around a huge bag)
In came a skunk (Hold nose)
With a pile of junk (Arms out-
stretched)
And moved into that house that
wintery day
When the owners were far away.

Last said the ape, (Flex muscles)
"It's time to escape." (Look around
and beckon to come)
So out went the toad (Stick out
tongue several times)
With another load. (Throw package
over back)
Out went the fox (Tap nose)
With a heavy box. (Lower arms
and grunt to lift)
Out went the pig (Puff out cheeks)
With a bag this big. (Curl arms
around a huge bag)
Out went the skunk (Hold nose)
With a pile of junk (Arms out-
stretched)
And moved out of that house that
wintery day
When the owners were soooo far
away. (Emphasize so)

Farmer Says

Play this variation of *Simon Says* in which children pretend to make a sound or move like the animal named. Remember, no one moves unless the direction is preceded by the words "Farmer

says." Add animals and actions for as long as the game holds the children's interest.

Farmer says all cows move out to
the pasture.
Farmer says all cows graze in the
pasture.
All cows go home.
Farmer says all cows go into the
barn.

Farmer says all pigs go to the pigpen.
Farmer says all pigs move two
spaces to the trough.

Farmer says all goats take one big
leap to the goat shed.
Go to the feed trough.
Farmer says all goats eat hay.

All chickens fly into the coop.
Farmer says all chickens fly into the
coop.
Scratch for feed.
Farmer says all chickens roost and
lay eggs.

All horses gallop to the corral.
Farmer says all horses trot to the
corral.
Farmer says all horses eat an apple.
All horses neigh and shake their
heads.

Rooms in a House

Clap out the rhythm of this chant, encouraging children to add to the list of rooms. Use the chant as an opportunity to introduce new vocabulary like *conservatory*, *sun porch*, and *tool shed*.

Upstairs, downstairs, let's take a look.
We'll name some rooms, every little
nook.

Bathroom, bedroom,
Family room, den.

Living room, parlor,
Basement, kitchen.

Playroom, attic,
Porch, hall, shed.

Library, dining room,
Shower room, pool.

With all these varied spaces,
Where did I leave my tools?

My House

Here is a nest for the robin. (Cup
both hands)

Here is a hive for the bee. (Fold
hands into fists)

Here is a hole for the bunny (Open
fists with hole)

And here is a house for me. (Open
hands with fingertips touching as
a roof)

Grab Your Cap

Use this rhyme as a transition for
going outdoors. Use knit caps in
winter, sun hats in summer, and
pretend caps in mild weather.

One and two and three and four,
(Hold up one finger at a time)

Who's that sitting on the floor?
(Shade eyes with hand and look
around)

(Child's name)'s waiting on the mat.
(Point to child)

Come on over and grab your cap.

(Beckon with arm and touch
head)

Small group or solitary activities

Some activities require quiet, reflec-
tive actions best done by individu-
als or in a small group of two or
three children. Such activities are
easier to manage and give each
child some time in the spotlight.

Animal House

Explore basic consonant sounds
with this verse.

Come to my animal house.

See the animals there.

There's a cat caught in the kitchen.

What else do you see there?

Invite—and prompt—children to
vary the third line of the verse to
name an animal, an action, and
the room, all beginning with the
same sound. Expect silliness when
you hear baboons babbling in
bathrooms, dogs dreaming in
dens, and hyenas howling in halls.

Write about my house

Make A-frame-shaped house
books and invite children to draw
or write stories about the people,
areas, or activities that take place
in the house.

Here's what you need:

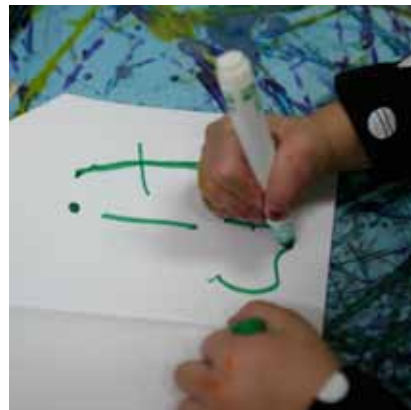
- colored construction paper
- plain or lined paper
- staples
- scissors
- markers

1. Cut or fold the paper into uni-
form sizes. The simplest is to
fold an 8 ½ by 11 sheet of paper
in half. Use two or three sheets
per book.
2. Cut or fold the construction
paper to make a cover for the
book.
3. Staple the papers together along
the left side.
4. Make two diagonal cuts along
the top of the book to make a
peaked roofline.
5. Encourage children to draw fea-
tures on the front and back cov-
ers. Invite them to draw fur-
nishings on the inside pages, or
use photos cut from magazines.
6. Store the house books together
in the class library and invite
the children to read the books
to each other.

Like the artist

Books by Leo Lionni and Eric
Carle invite style imitation. Share
the books and encourage the chil-
dren to notice the illustrations,
especially the texture, color, scale,
and translucency.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN GAETZ



Here's what you need:

- sheets of freezer paper
- finger paint
- tissue paper
- scissors
- glue

1. Follow up a reading activity with art in the style of these noted collage makers. Many illustrations by Lionni and Carle depict scenes under water. Compare these with above-ground pictures. Help children notice details and moods to mimic.
2. Invite the children to make finger paint art on the freezer paper. The finger paint design will be the background of the picture.
3. When the paint has dried, talk with children about how they would like to enhance the picture.
4. Offer scissors, tissue paper, and glue. Talk about the *translucency* of the tissue—that is, you can see an image underneath but the light is diffused. Compare with the *transparency* of plastic

wrap or cellophane, which allows you to see the image clearly.

5. Experiment with torn rather than cut paper.

Frog puppet

Make frog puppets to accompany finger plays, books, and action rhymes. Consider using the puppets with *Five Green and Speckled Frogs*, *I'm a Little Green Frog*, and any of the *Froggy* books by Jonathan London.

Here's what you need:

- paper plates
- staples
- scissors
- construction paper
- glue
- markers
- cardboard

1. Cut one paper plate in half. Fold a second plate in half.
2. Staple the halves around the edges of the second plate so that there is an opening for a hand.

3. Make a cardboard template of the frog's face—use this illustration to guide you. Help the

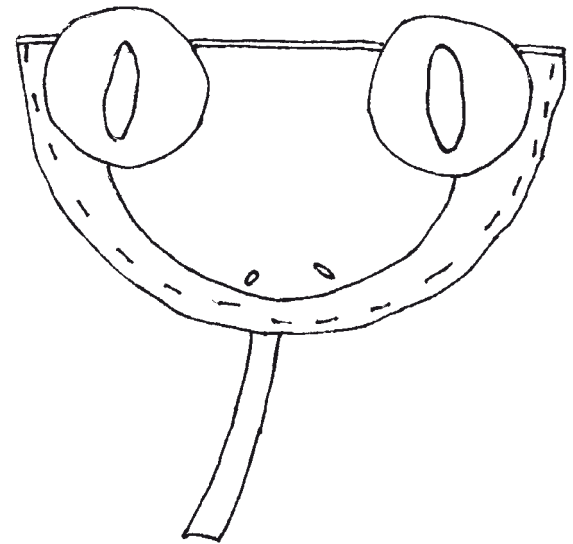
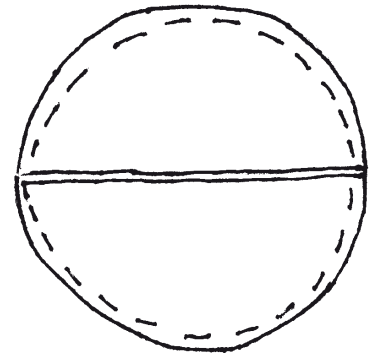


PHOTO BY SUSAN GAETZ

children trace the face onto construction paper. Cut out large eye circles from construction paper and glue to the face.

Decorate with markers.

4. Glue the face to the top half of the plate puppet.

Display board house sort

Introduce this activity with the Rooms in a House chant above.

Adapt this game to the space you have. It's most fun on a large display board but also works as a folder or table game.

Here's what you need:

- discarded magazines with household pictures
- scissors
- wall space
- mural paper
- double-sided removable tape
- storage box
- marker

1. Cut a long sheet of mural paper. Draw vertical columns, and at the top of each write the name of the room you'd like to feature. Be sure to include kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and living room.
2. Attach the paper to a wall. Make sure the children can reach all areas of the paper.
3. Cut out sample pictures—beds, cooking spoons, toilet tissue, shampoo, books, television set, and dinner plates, for example—from old magazines. Place the pictures in a storage box near the board.
4. Make magazines and scissors available to children and encourage them to find photos to add to the box.
5. Give a lesson on the use of double-sided tape.

6. Talk with the children about the rooms you've identified and ask them to describe the rooms in their own houses.

7. Invite the children to match the pictures with the proper room, taping the picture in the correct column. Encourage the children to move pictures from room to room as they see fit. For example, many homes have books in all rooms.

Adaptation: Make a similar game featuring animals and the attributes of their natural homes. For example, under a "Squirrel" column heading, children might tape pictures of pecans and trees.

Classic picture books about houses

- Bang, Molly. 1983. *Ten, Nine, Eight*. New York: Greenwillow.
- Barrett, Judi. 1968. *Old MacDonald Had an Apartment House*. New York: Atheneum.
- Carle, Eric. 1987. *A House for a Hermit Crab*. New York: Picture Book Studio.
- Fleming, Denise. 1991. *In the Tall, Tall Grass*. New York: Holt.
- Galdone, Paul. 1971. *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hoberman, Mary Ann. 1978. *A House Is a House for Me*. New York: Viking.
- Keats, Ezra Jack. 1967. *Peter's Chair*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Kent, Jack. 1984. *Joey*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Lionni, Leo. 1968. *The Biggest House in the World*. New York, London, Jonathan. 1992. *Froggy Gets Dressed*. New York: Viking.
- McCloskey, Robert. 1941. *Make Way for Ducklings*. New York: Viking.

McDonald, Megan. 1990. *Is This a House for a Hermit Crab?* New York: Watts.

Sendak, Maurice. 1970. *In the Night Kitchen*. New York: Harper & Row.

Waber, Bernard. 1972. *Ira Sleeps Over*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Wildsmith, Brian. 1980. *Animal Homes*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Williams, Vera. 1982. *A Chair for My Mother*. New York: Greenwillow.

References

- Irving, J. and R. Currie. 1991. *Raising the Roof: Children's Stories and Activities on Houses*. Englewood Co.: Teacher Ideas Press.
- Maddigan, B., S. Drennan, and R. E. Thompson. 2005. *The Big Book of Reading, Rhyming, and Resources: Programs for Children Ages 4 - 8*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Libraries Unlimited.
- Opitz, M. and M. F. Opitz. 2000. *Rhymes and Reasons: Literature and Language Play for Phonological Awareness*. New York: Heinemann.
- Raines, Shirley C. and R. J. Canady. 1989. *Story Stretchers: Activities to Expand Children's Favorite Books*. Beltsville, Md.: Gryphon House. ■