

EXPLORE | Story Basket Discovery

12–18 MONTHS Touch • Notice • Listen • Connect

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Infants and young toddlers explore stories through touch, sound, repetition, and familiar objects. The goal is shared attention and early communication, not retelling the story.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Choose a quiet floor area or cozy corner.
- Place only 2–3 safe props in a small basket.
- Sit close enough to follow the child’s attention.
- Add a familiar board book if the child is interested.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Small basket or container
- Board book
- Soft puppet or stuffed animal
- Scarf or fabric square
- Large familiar toy or household prop

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- “Look!”
- “Soft bear.”
- “Where did it go?”
- “You found it!”
- “More?”

WHAT TO NOTICE

- Reaching, grasping, transferring and pointing
- Looking between the educator, object and book
- Imitating sounds, gestures or facial expressions
- Repeating an action or returning to a favourite prop

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: “Today, Maya explored our story basket and repeatedly chose the soft bear. She looked at the bear, then at me, while I named it and made a simple bear sound. This supported shared attention, early language, fine-motor control and connection through repeated play.”

Family conversation prompts:

- “What object does your child choose again and again?”
- “Can you name what they are looking at, touching or doing?”
- “Try hiding a familiar toy under a scarf and ask, ‘Where did it go?’”

Keep it simple: Use large, washable items with no small parts. Follow the child’s cues and allow lots of repetition.

EXPLORE | Story Basket Discovery

19–36 MONTHS Name • Pretend • Repeat • Respond

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Toddlers use story baskets to name familiar objects, copy actions, join repeated phrases, and begin connecting props to simple story events.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Choose one familiar book, rhyme or everyday theme.
- Place 4–6 matching props in a basket.
- Invite children to explore before reading or telling the story.
- Keep the basket available for repeated play later in the day.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Basket or bin
- Board or picture book
- Animal figures or soft toys
- Toy food or simple household props
- Scarves or fabric pieces
- Simple picture cards

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- “What is this?”
- “Who is hungry?”
- “Can you show me?”
- “What happened?”
- “What comes next?”

WHAT TO NOTICE

- New words, sounds and repeated phrases
- Pretend actions such as feeding, sleeping or hiding
- Following one-step directions
- Taking turns and watching another child’s idea
- Connecting a prop to part of the story

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: “Eli used the spoon and bowl from our story basket to pretend-feed the bear. He said ‘bear eat’ and repeated the action several times. This play supported vocabulary, symbolic thinking, fine-motor coordination and early sequencing.”

Family conversation prompts:

- “Can your child show you what a character is doing?”
- “Ask, ‘Who needs this?’ or ‘What happens next?’”
- “Use 2–3 household objects to make a simple story together.”

Keep it simple: There is no need to finish the book. Follow the child’s interest and repeat favourite words and actions.

EXPLORE | Story Basket Discovery

3–4 YEARS Retell • Sequence • Imagine • Explain

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Preschoolers use props and picture cues to retell familiar stories, sequence events, describe characters, and add their own ideas and endings.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Choose a familiar story with a clear beginning, middle and end.
- Add simple character and setting props to a basket.
- Include 3–5 picture cards children can arrange.
- Provide space for children to retell alone or with a peer.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Story basket
- Picture book
- Character figures or puppets
- Fabric or loose parts for a setting
- Story sequence cards
- Paper and crayons

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- “What happened first?”
- “How do you know?”
- “What could happen next?”
- “How is the character feeling?”
- “Could the story end another way?”

WHAT TO NOTICE

- Sequencing events and remembering details
- Using descriptive vocabulary
- Explaining ideas and making connections
- Changing or extending the story
- Listening and negotiating ideas with peers

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: “Sofia arranged three story pictures in order and used the props to retell the main events. She then changed the ending so the characters worked together. This supported memory, sequencing, expressive language, imagination and problem-solving.”

Family conversation prompts:

- “Ask your child to tell you the beginning, middle and end of a favourite story.”
- “Try, ‘What would you do if you were the character?’”
- “Invite your child to invent a different ending.”

Keep it simple: Accept the child’s version of the story. The focus is communication, sequencing and imagination rather than perfect recall.

CREATE | Puppet & Prop Play

12–18 MONTHS Imitate • Move • Express • Connect

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Infants and young toddlers explore puppets through movement, sound, peekaboo and simple social exchanges. Puppets become a playful way to support imitation and early communication.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Sit with the child in a calm, familiar space.
- Offer one soft puppet at a time.
- Move the puppet slowly and pause for the child's response.
- Pair simple words or sounds with the puppet's movement.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Soft hand puppet
- Stuffed animal
- Scarf
- Unbreakable mirror
- Familiar board book

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- "Hello!"
- "Peekaboo!"
- "Bear is waving."
- "Your turn."
- "Bye-bye!"

WHAT TO NOTICE

- Eye contact and shared attention
- Smiles, vocalizations and gestures
- Imitating a wave, sound or movement
- Reaching for and manipulating the puppet
- Anticipating a repeated routine

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: "Noah watched the puppet wave, smiled, and then moved his own hand after I said 'wave hello.' He repeated the exchange several times. This supported imitation, social connection, early communication and coordination."

Family conversation prompts:

- "Use a stuffed animal to say hello and goodbye."
- "Pause and see if your child copies a sound or movement."
- "Try a simple peekaboo game with a scarf."

Keep it simple: Avoid sudden puppet movements. Keep the interaction warm, predictable and responsive to the child's comfort.

CREATE | Puppet & Prop Play

19–36 MONTHS Pretend • Talk • Take Turns • Express

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Toddlers use puppets and simple props to copy familiar routines, make sounds, use emerging words, and act out feelings and everyday experiences.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Offer 2–4 puppets or simple character props.
- Create a small play space using a low table, box or blanket.
- Add a few familiar props such as a cup, spoon or blanket.
- Let children lead short, repeated play scenes.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Sock, paper bag or soft puppets
- Stuffed animals
- Scarves or fabric
- Toy food or dishes
- Small cardboard box
- Simple dress-up pieces

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- “What does your puppet say?”
- “Is the baby tired?”
- “Can your puppet help?”
- “How does the puppet feel?”
- “What should we do next?”

WHAT TO NOTICE

- Using words or sounds for a character
- Pretending one object represents another
- Acting out familiar routines
- Taking turns with an adult or peer
- Expressing simple feelings through play

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: “Ava used a puppet to say ‘baby sad’ and covered it with a scarf like a blanket. She then patted the puppet and said ‘shh.’ This supported pretend play, emotional expression, vocabulary and caring social behaviours.”

Family conversation prompts:

- “Ask, ‘How is your puppet feeling?’”
- “Use a stuffed animal to act out bedtime, mealtime or getting ready.”
- “Take turns giving the puppet one simple line or action.”

Keep it simple: Short scenes are enough. Repetition is developmentally appropriate and helps toddlers build confidence and language.

CREATE | Puppet & Prop Play

3–4 YEARS Create • Plan • Perform • Problem-Solve

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Preschoolers create characters, develop simple storylines, negotiate roles, and use puppets to express ideas, feelings and solutions to problems.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Offer simple puppet-making supplies or ready-made puppets.
- Set up a small stage using a box, table or blanket.
- Place props where children can independently choose them.
- Invite small groups to create or act out a story.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Paper bags, craft sticks or socks
- Markers and crayons
- Tape or glue sticks
- Yarn and fabric scraps
- Small props or loose parts
- Cardboard box or tabletop stage

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- “Who is your character?”
- “What does your character want?”
- “What problem could happen?”
- “How could they solve it?”
- “How will your story end?”

WHAT TO NOTICE

- Planning and explaining a character idea
- Using dialogue and descriptive language
- Sequencing a beginning, middle and end
- Negotiating roles and taking turns
- Using pretend play to solve a social problem

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: “Leo created a stick puppet and decided it was a firefighter looking for a lost puppy. With a friend, he planned where the puppy was hiding and how the character could help. This supported storytelling, collaboration, problem-solving, fine-motor skills and expressive language.”

Family conversation prompts:

- “Ask, ‘Who is your character and what do they want?’”
- “Invite your child to make a puppet from a paper bag or spoon.”
- “Try creating a small problem for the characters to solve together.”

Keep it simple: The puppet does not need to look a certain way. Value the child’s ideas, language and play process over the finished product.

BUILD | Story Scene Challenge

12–18 MONTHS Place • Hide • Find • Repeat

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Infants and young toddlers explore simple story scenes by placing, carrying, stacking, hiding and finding familiar objects. These actions build early spatial concepts and cause-and-effect understanding.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Use a clear floor space with a small mat or tray.
- Offer one or two large props with soft blocks or cups.
- Model simple actions such as in, out, up and under.
- Allow repeated placing, hiding and finding.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Soft blocks
- Nesting cups
- Large animal figure or soft toy
- Small basket
- Scarf or fabric square
- Board book

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- “In.”
- “Out.”
- “Up!”
- “Where did it go?”
- “You found it!”

WHAT TO NOTICE

- Placing objects in and out of containers
- Stacking, carrying and transferring
- Searching for a hidden object
- Repeating an action to see what happens
- Responding to simple spatial words

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: “Aria placed the animal in the basket, took it out, and repeated the action several times as I used the words ‘in’ and ‘out.’ She later searched for it under a scarf. This supported spatial awareness, cause and effect, fine-motor coordination and early language.”

Family conversation prompts:

- “Use a box and a favourite toy to practise ‘in’ and ‘out.’”
- “Hide a toy partly under a cloth and ask, ‘Where is it?’”
- “Name the child’s actions: up, down, in, out, under.”

Keep it simple: Use only large, stable materials. At this age, building the “story” may simply be repeated actions with an object.

BUILD | Story Scene Challenge

19–36 MONTHS Build • Pretend • Sequence • Collaborate

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Toddlers combine blocks, boxes and familiar figures to build simple settings and act out everyday routines. They begin to connect building with pretend play and simple sequences.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Choose a floor or table area with room to build.
- Offer a small set of blocks, figures and fabric pieces.
- Begin with a familiar setting such as a home, farm or park.
- Leave the scene available so children can return to it.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Blocks
- Small cardboard boxes
- Toy animals or people
- Fabric pieces
- Toy vehicles
- Simple picture cards

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- “Where should it go?”
- “Who lives here?”
- “What happens now?”
- “Can we make a bed/road/home?”
- “What could we add?”

WHAT TO NOTICE

- Building a structure for a purpose
- Using objects in pretend ways
- Connecting two or more events
- Trying a different way when something falls
- Playing beside or with another child

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: “Mateo used blocks to make a bed for the toy dog, covered it with fabric, and then added a box as a ‘house.’ He explained, ‘dog sleep home.’ This supported planning, pretend play, vocabulary, spatial reasoning and early sequencing.”

Family conversation prompts:

- “Ask, ‘What are you building and who is it for?’”
- “Use boxes or blocks to make a home for a favourite toy.”
- “Try, ‘What does your character need next?’”

Keep it simple: Toddlers may build and knock down repeatedly. Treat redesigning and rebuilding as part of the learning process.

BUILD | Story Scene Challenge

3–4 YEARS Plan • Sequence • Build • Explain

WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

Preschoolers design story settings, sequence events, collaborate with peers, and change their structures as the story develops. Building gives children a concrete way to represent ideas.

HOW TO SET IT UP

- Provide a defined building area with open-ended materials.
- Add characters or story cards as optional starting points.
- Invite children to plan a setting before or while they build.
- Allow time to test, change and extend the scene.

BASIC MATERIALS

- Blocks and cardboard boxes
- Toy people or animals
- Fabric and natural loose parts
- Paper, crayons and tape
- Story or setting cards
- Clipboards for simple plans

EDUCATOR PROMPTS

- “What setting are you building?”
- “What happens first?”
- “What does your character need?”
- “How could you change it?”
- “Can you explain your plan?”

WHAT TO NOTICE

- Planning and representing an idea
- Sequencing events in a story
- Explaining choices and changes
- Collaborating and negotiating with peers
- Persisting when a design needs to change

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH FAMILIES

Example: “Priya and a friend planned a bridge for their characters to cross. When the blocks tipped, they widened the base and tested it again before continuing the story. This supported planning, collaboration, persistence, spatial reasoning and storytelling.”

Family conversation prompts:

- “Ask your child to draw or describe a setting before building it.”
- “Try, ‘What could you change if it does not work?’”
- “Invite your child to tell the story while you build together.”

Keep it simple: Ask children to explain their thinking before offering a solution. The building process is part of the story and the learning.