

Storytelling Invitation Idea Bank

Simple, low-prep ways to bring stories, puppets and imagination into everyday play.

A SIMPLE FORMULA: STORY + PROP + POSSIBILITY

Choose a familiar story or idea. Add a few open-ended props. Invite children to explore what could happen — without expecting everyone to retell the story the same way.

10 Easy Invitations to Try

Story Basket	Place a familiar book with 3–5 related objects in a basket. Children can touch, name, match, act out or change the story.
Mystery Story Bag	Add a few familiar objects to a cloth bag. Pull out one item at a time and wonder together: “Who could use this?”
Puppet Hello	Keep one simple puppet near gathering time. Let it greet children, ask a question, sing a song or introduce a story.
Finish the Story	Begin with one sentence: “One day, a little bear found...” Pause and invite children to add an idea, sound, action or object.
Build the Setting	After reading, offer blocks, boxes, fabric and figures. Invite children to build a home, forest, road, store or other story place.
Story Walk	Place 3–4 picture cards or props around the room. Move from one to the next and create a story together.
Prop of the Day	Offer one open-ended item — scarf, box, spoon, basket or tube — and ask, “What could this be in our story?”
Puppet Problem	Use a puppet with a simple social problem: “Bear wants a turn. What could Bear do?” Let children offer possibilities.
Sound Story	Tell a very short story and invite children to add sounds: rain, footsteps, animal noises, wind, vehicles or laughter.
Photo Story Starter	Use a photo of an animal, place or familiar classroom moment. Ask children what might be happening and what could happen next.

Make It Work Across Ages

Use the same basic invitation, then adjust the number of materials, language and level of independence.

12–18 MONTHS | Keep it sensory, familiar and repetitive.

SET UP	Offer 1–2 safe props at a time. Use soft puppets, sturdy books, scarves, photos and familiar objects.
EDUCATOR ROLE	Name what the child notices. Copy sounds and gestures. Repeat favourite actions and phrases.
TRY SAYING	“Look — bear.” • “Where did it go?” • “Again?” • “Soft.”

19–36 MONTHS | Add simple choices, actions and pretend play.

SET UP	Offer a few related props and leave space for children to move, carry, feed, hide, build and imitate.
EDUCATOR ROLE	Follow the child’s storyline. Add short questions and model simple pretend actions without taking over.
TRY SAYING	“Who is this?” • “What is happening?” • “Where will it go?” • “What could we do?”

3–4 YEARS | Invite planning, sequencing and collaborative stories.

SET UP	Add loose parts, character figures, picture cards, drawing tools and materials children can combine in different ways.
EDUCATOR ROLE	Invite children to explain ideas, negotiate roles, change the story and represent what happened.
TRY SAYING	“What happens first?” • “What could happen next?” • “How could we solve that?” • “Tell me about your idea.”

REMEMBER

The goal is not a perfect retelling or finished product. The learning is in the child’s listening, experimenting, communicating, pretending, revising and connecting with others.

Storytelling Prompt & Documentation Toolkit

Language educators can use to extend play — and make the learning visible to families.

NOTICE & DESCRIBE

Use when children are beginning to explore.

“I noticed you chose...” • “You put the ___ beside...” • “Your puppet is...” • “You are looking closely at...” • “You did that again.”

INVITE LANGUAGE

Use without turning play into a quiz.

“Tell me about this.” • “Who is in your story?” • “What do you notice?” • “What is your character doing?” • “What sound could we add?”

EXTEND IMAGINATION

Open possibilities instead of giving the next step.

“I wonder what could happen next.” • “What else could this be?” • “Where might they go?” • “What could we add to the story?”
• “How could the story change?”

SUPPORT PROBLEM-SOLVING

Useful during collaborative or dramatic play.

“What could the character try?” • “How could we make room for both ideas?” • “What could we change?” • “What should we try next?” • “How did you figure that out?”

WHEN A CHILD DOESN'T ANSWER

A prompt does not require a verbal response. Pause, watch, imitate the child's action, add one simple word, or let the play continue. Gestures, sounds, movement, looking and choosing are also communication.

Communicating the Learning to Families

Move beyond “We played with puppets today” by describing what the child did, what you observed, and why it matters.

A SIMPLE DOCUMENTATION FORMULA

WHAT HAPPENED + CHILD’S ACTION/WORDS + LEARNING OBSERVED + A QUESTION FOR HOME

12–18 MONTHS — EXAMPLE

FAMILY MESSAGE

Today, Maya reached for the dog puppet, smiled when it appeared, and copied the “woof” sound several times. Through this playful exchange, she was practising joint attention, imitation, early communication and turn-taking.

At home: What animal sounds, gestures or repeated parts of stories does your child enjoy joining in with?

19–36 MONTHS — EXAMPLE

FAMILY MESSAGE

Today, Leo used a scarf as a blanket for the bear and said, “Baby sleeping.” He repeated the routine, then invited another child to help wake the bear. This play supported vocabulary, symbolic thinking, sequencing and social connection.

At home: What everyday routines does your child like to pretend or act out?

3–4 YEARS — EXAMPLE

FAMILY MESSAGE

Today, Ava and Noah built a house for two puppets. When the doorway was too small, they moved the blocks, tested a new idea and explained where each character would sleep. Their story supported planning, collaboration, problem-solving and expressive language.

At home: Ask your child to tell you about a story they created today. What happened first, next and at the end?

Quick Family Prompts to Share

- “Tell me about a character you played with today.”
- “Can we make a story with three things we find at home?”
- “What could this spoon/scarf/box become in a story?”
- “Can you show me what happened next?”
- “What voice or sound would your character make?”