

# Creating Print-Rich Learning Centers

Many preschoolers can already read labels on food boxes, recognize symbols and logos, and understand road signs. In a print-rich classroom environment, children can read and write for a wide variety of authentic, everyday purposes. They see and understand how print is used to label shelves and containers, describe bulletin board displays, recall a shared experience, or record attendance. They have many opportunities to explore books, draw, write, and begin to recognize familiar names and words. Here are some ways teachers can provide a print-rich preschool environment to encourage children with a range of literacy skills.

Juli L. Pool and Deborah R. Carter

## **Where: Literacy Center**

**Why:** Sharing books with children not only motivates them to learn to read but also promotes learning in other areas.

**How:** Offer a variety of books and magazines. Include books related to topics you and the children are exploring. Rotate books frequently as children build skills and discover new interests.

Display books on low shelves, with the covers facing out. Provide a few comfortable spaces to sit, and stuffed animals, puppets, or a classroom pet for the children to “read” to. Nearby, create a listening center with recorded books. In the listening center, children can examine books and learn how they work by following text while listening to a recording.



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**Where: Writing Center**

**Why:** Writing materials encourage children's language development and self-expression. Children can build the fine motor skills needed for writing (for example, pencil grip, hand-eye coordination).

**How:** Offer a variety of writing tools (pencils, crayons, markers, magnetic letters), paper (different shapes, sizes, and colors), and other kinds of writing surfaces (chalk boards and magnetic boards). Encourage writing by providing an alphabet chart and posting a list of children's names. Include book-making materials (hole punch, stapler, shoelaces or thick yarn) and ready-made blank books for children to fill. Provide individual mailboxes for children (and for yourself!) so children can send and receive messages.

**Where: Dramatic Play Center**

**Why:** Children take on roles, express their ideas and develop plans for play, talk with one another and their teachers, and include reading and writing in the play.

**How:** Include props and play materials related to places and events that are familiar and interesting to children. For example, include items for recreating a home, grocery store, office, restaurant, doctor's or veterinarian's office, post office, barbershop, or movie theater. To encourage reading and writing, offer paper, pencils, clipboards, appointment books, magazines, patient charts,

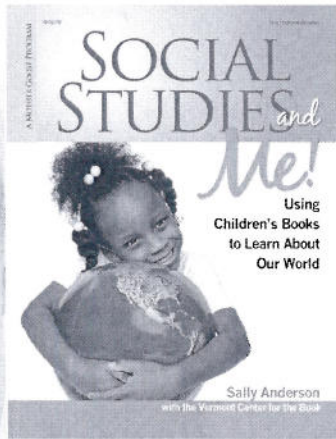
prescription pads, wall signs, and file folders. Children can use these items in a number of play scenarios.

Connect the dramatic play center to a field trip or class project. For example, after visiting the local pet shop, add stuffed animals, a fishnet and an aquarium stocked with plastic fish, and empty fish food containers. Or create a zoo center after a trip to the zoo. Children can be the zookeeper, the animals, the visitors, or the cashiers accepting payment for tickets, snacks, and gifts. Children might create signs for the animal cages or read prices as they ring up gifts in the shop.

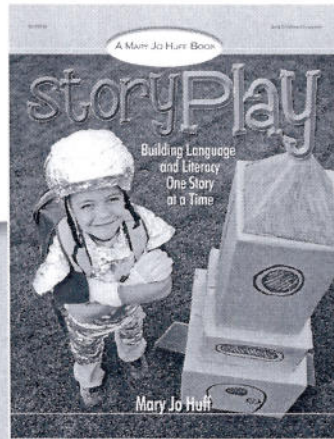
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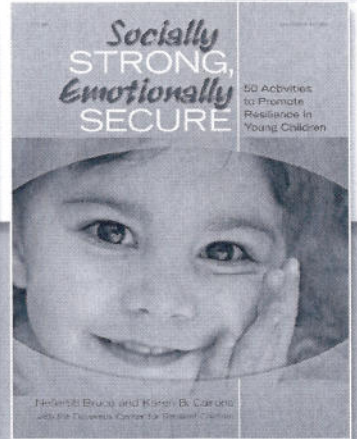
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**Where: Computer Center**

**Why:** Children follow instructions and read cues to access games and programs. They talk with one another and use the computer to communicate, write, problem solve, and gather information from child-safe Internet sites.

**How:** Set up the computer center with two chairs and enough space for two children to work and learn together. Choose interactive and literacy-related computer games and programs. If your center has Internet access, research and provide access to websites that support preschool literacy.

Teach children how to use the computer and software so they can be independent. Show them how to turn on the computer, open folders, find files, and save their work. Make and post step-by-step charts using photos or illustrations to help children remember what to do.

**Where: Science Center**

**Why:** Children discuss their discoveries with one another and practice looking up information in nonfiction books and texts. They can gather, record, and summarize information in charts or graphs. A well-stocked, engaging science center sparks children's interest and provides a place to seek answers to their questions.

**How:** Include materials for small group activities so children can repeat an activity and expand on their interests on their own. Children can use items such as magnifying glasses, twee-

zers, rulers, beakers, balance scales, and small microscopes to explore materials and substances. Foster discovery learning by offering books, writing materials, and pictures and charts related to various topics in science (for example, dinosaurs, animals, plants). Change the materials and activities regularly in response to individual and group interests. Include signs, pictures, and labels as well as writing tools and paper or blank booklets to encourage children to document their experiments and conclusions and learn new vocabulary.



**How a print-rich environment supports learning**

Offer materials and activities throughout the classroom that encourage reading, writing, and talking. They are tools for supporting children's literacy development. Preparing your classroom to provide optimal exposure to literacy helps children understand and use language to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others.

We have shared a few ideas for making your whole classroom rich with print, but the opportunities are endless. We encourage you to be creative and develop more strategies to make literacy learning engaging for children!