

KICK-START

Kindergarten Readiness

52

REPRODUCIBLE
PARENT
LETTERS!

- Social-emotional skills
- Math explorations
- Science inquiry
- Emerging literacy skills
- Language and vocabulary development
- Gross and fine motor skills

Alison Pepper

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INTRODUCTION AND HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As teachers of four-year-old children, one of your primary considerations is how to best prepare the children in your classroom for their transition to kindergarten. Your school, your director, and local and federal licensing agencies all place a variety of requirements on you, so the activities and projects that you plan advance this readiness goal every day. Frequently, you may hear questions from families about how to best prepare their children for the next step into kindergarten. The pressure for the children's success may feel like it rests on your shoulders, but you don't have to do it alone. You have excellent allies—the children's families! Families are your partners in their children's education. In fact, they are their children's first teachers. Honoring that fact is empowering and will help you build an effective home-school connection.



This book is a tool to facilitate your efforts in engaging families and establishing the home-school connection. We know how busy you are! We offer you a variety of developmentally appropriate learning activities that you can send home to families each week so they can participate in their child's learning and can reinforce concepts and skills you are introducing in school. Each activity has been designed to help adults at home spend time on a specific play-based activity with their children. Learning comes naturally to children—they are curious, notice detail, and love to ask questions. Each activity gives families ways to support that innate curiosity.

How to Use This Book

What do children need to be ready to learn in kindergarten? Each week, choose a letter and accompanying activity to send home to families that will support learning in the following areas:

- Oral language and vocabulary
- Emerging literacy
- Social-emotional skills
- Math explorations
- Science investigations
- Fine and gross-motor skills

You can photocopy the letters and activities to send home with the children, or you can attach them to weekly emails or newsletters to families.

Each letter explains the learning that is taking place and offers a short note about the research behind why the activity supports that learning. The activities themselves are simple to do and require just a few commonly found materials—or no materials at all. Simple, specific instructions guide families in engaging their children in developmentally appropriate ways.

As families engage with their children at home, they can feel that they are directly contributing to their children's learning and future academic success. They can support the development of their children's independence and autonomy, emergent literacy, and cognitive and social-emotional skills and can advance children's understanding of the world around them. By participating in their children's learning using these guided activities, families will help prepare their children for an easy transition to kindergarten.

CHAPTER

1

Skills and Knowledge to Help Children Get Ready for Kindergarten



Oral Language and Vocabulary

The ability to fully express themselves verbally is an important skill for kindergarten children. They need to communicate with peers to ask to play, to negotiate play, and to develop social relationships. They need to be able to tell an adult when they are upset or hurt or sick. They need to be able to express needs, such as hunger or needing to go to the bathroom. When young children can communicate needs, wants, and thoughts to adults and peers, they are able to feel more comfortable in the classroom setting and to open up whole worlds of learning in that environment.

Encourage family members to talk with and listen to their children. By simply naming objects and answering their children's questions as best they can, they will encourage important vocabulary growth. They can narrate household activities and chores. They can talk about objects and features they notice in the home and in the environment. They can sing songs and tell stories—especially those that reflect the family's culture. They can ask their children questions in a lighthearted way that encourages children to express their ideas and opinions. Simple encouragement and reinforcement at home will nurture children's oral language skills and vocabulary development to help them be ready for kindergarten.



Emerging Literacy

Four-year-old children are beginning to make the connection between spoken language and written symbols. While the typical preschooler is not quite reading yet, many are beginning to learn the names for some letters and the sounds that go with certain letters. They are also beginning to recognize print that they commonly see in the environment. Families can support this natural curiosity about letters and writing with simple activities at home. One of the best ways to support emerging literacy is to simply read to the child. Encourage families to read to their children every day. Invite them to check out books from the local library, and consider letting children take home books from the classroom book center to read with their families. Families can support letter recognition by encouraging their children to look for letters and words both at home and in the environment. They can sing, make up silly rhymes to play with letter sounds, and encourage their children to write letters and words.

Social-Emotional Skills

Social-emotional skills are so important to a child's success in kindergarten. Young children are just learning how to interact with others, how to wait for a turn, how to ask to play with a friend, and how

to handle and express their emotions. They do not need to be experts in all of these skills by the time they start kindergarten, but they are certainly beginning to learn them.

Families can support their children's social-emotional learning through simple activities at home. They can help children name emotions: "I see you frowning. I think you might be mad," or "I see you smiling. Are you happy?" They can help their children learn to problem solve: "Let's see. You both want the truck. What can you do so both of you get a turn with it?" Encourage families to reinforce social-emotional awareness at home with activities such as playing games and doing puzzles together, taking turns in a family dance party, and finding ways for their child to be a helper at home.

Math Explorations

Math is a natural part of children's play. They decide how many plates and cups they need for their restaurant in the dramatic play center. They learn to connect number words, such as *one* and *two*, with the quantities those words represent. They learn to connect shape names with the shapes they represent. As they play board games, they learn to count the number of spaces to move their tokens without counting a space twice or skipping a space. Math appears in children's songs and books—"How many pigs? One, two, three!" Young children love to help. Math is part of sorting laundry by color or type of clothing.

Encourage families to support their children's math learning with simple, fun activities to share at home. As children become more familiar with vocabulary around numbers and shapes, they will be more confident in their math explorations.

Science Explorations

Children are natural scientists. They love to ask questions: How does a seed grow? Why are some leaves yellow? What will happen if I put water in the freezer? How many blocks tall am I? What does a cat (or gerbil or turtle) need to grow and be healthy? Instead of simply answering their children's questions, encourage families to explore these questions and let the children make scientific discoveries about the world around them. Through observing, wondering, questioning, predicting, experimenting, and thinking, children develop critical-thinking skills that will lay the foundations for more science learning in kindergarten.

Fine and Gross Motor Skills

Preschool children are growing quickly and learning to use their bodies as they become stronger and more agile. This is the perfect time to support their explorations and newfound skills to help them get ready for kindergarten. Young children are experimenting with gross-motor skills as they balance, jump, run, catch, throw, kick, and climb. Their fine-motor skills improve when they have opportunities to use their forefingers and thumbs in pincer movements and lacing activities and to use their whole

hands to smush and mold playdough, explore sand, or paint with fingerpaints.

Encourage families to engage their children in the fun activities included in this book. They can explore throwing a small ball overhand and underhand, tossing a bean bag or kicking a ball at a target, jumping and hopping as they play hopscotch, balancing on one foot and on a low beam, and climbing on playground equipment. Families can enjoy exploring the textures of and sculpting with homemade playdough, painting with tools and with fingers (and toes!), using child-safe scissors to cut paper, lacing yarn or ribbon through cardboard, and sifting objects from sand.

With confidence in their abilities, the children will feel ready to meet the exciting challenges of kindergarten!



CHAPTER

2

Oral Language and Vocabulary



Dear families:

Words, words, words—everywhere we go, we see words! Children are exposed to lots of different kinds of print in books, newspapers, magazines, on signs, and on the street.

Help your child enrich his or her vocabulary by paying attention to the words in your surroundings. As you walk in your neighborhood or go about your daily business, help your child notice signs, logos, and symbols. Read the signs to your child and talk about what they mean. Point out a letter and make that letter sound.

At home, you can create a print-rich environment for your child by placing labels on objects, such as a chair, a window, and the refrigerator. Point out the labels to your child and read them aloud. Although you shouldn't expect your child to read at this stage, this simple activity will help your child learn to recognize new words, recognize letters, and understand the purpose of printed language—to communicate! Developing this understanding of print will build a foundation as your child begins to understand that words have meaning.

Sincerely,

Your child's teacher

LABELING AT HOME

What I Need

Magic marker
Thick paper, oak tag, or a file folder
Masking tape or painter's tape
Scissors (adult use only)

What to Do

1. Ahead of time, cut a bunch of 4- to 5-inch rectangle cards that you can use for your labels.
2. Start in the kitchen, and ask your child to help you in a labeling game. Your child will be very familiar with labeling, as we do it our classroom.
3. Ask your child what appliances and items to label. Choose between five and seven items.
4. One at a time, write the word for each item on a card. Say the letters aloud as you write them: "W-I-N-D-O-W. Window starts with W. W makes the /w/ /w/ sound."
5. Ask your child to tape the label on the object. Try to keep the labels at your child's eye level wherever possible. Read the labels aloud.
6. Return to review the labels with your child in a couple of days. Add a few more labels if you wish.
7. Leave the labels up as long as you feel comfortable having them around.

What My Child Is Learning

As you expose your child to labels, he or she is learning to make connections between the object and the word name. Your child's vocabulary increases as a result, and this will support his or her emerging ability to recognize some letters and, later, begin to read.

What the Research Says

Researchers have found that exposure to written language helps children develop an awareness of print, letter naming, and phonemic awareness. Through exposure to oral language, preschool children develop listening comprehension, vocabulary, and language skills.

Dear families:

Wherever we go, we see words popping out at us—on the street as we walk, drive, or ride; as we shop; and as we relax at home. Many words we see over and over again on street signs, store names, traffic signs, subway posters, newspaper stands, and so on. As children start to notice letters and words, they begin to recognize the “picture” of a common word. Most often that starts with the child’s name. Then they start to notice logos and symbols that are prominent in the community. That’s emergent literacy—that’s beginning to read!

Finding words everywhere is exciting for children, especially when you join in the game with them. This is a great way to make early reading fun!

Sincerely,

Your child’s teacher

ON THE STREET—FINDING WORDS EVERYWHERE

What I Need

No materials needed

What to Do

1. Go for a walk or a ride with your child.
2. As you go, talk with your child. Read signs that you see. Pay attention to the words that catch your child's eye.
3. Point out letters that your child may recognize. "Look! That stop sign has the letter S. Your name starts with S."
4. Make a game of finding words everywhere. How many stop signs can your child find? What does that sign tell us about that shop? What is that poster advertising?
5. Draw attention to words all around to help accelerate your child's understanding of the importance of language in both speaking and reading. Your child will gain confidence and joy in the ability to recognize letters and words, and that will ultimately lead to a love of reading!

What My Child Is Learning

Recognizing letters, logos, and words are some of the early stages in learning to read.

What the Research Says

Researchers have found that exposure to written language helps children develop an awareness of print, letter naming, and phonemic awareness. Through exposure to oral language, preschool children develop listening comprehension, vocabulary, and language skills.

Dear families:

One of our objectives in preparing your children for kindergarten is to build their vocabulary and comprehension of more words to develop their oral language skills.

Every single day you can introduce new vocabulary to your child as you speak with him or her about everyday life. Don't be afraid to use "big" words—children love them. Consider, for example, how young children seem to know the names of every dinosaur! As their vocabulary increases, so will their confidence and ability to express themselves clearly.

For this week's activity, we will play a simple and easy word game: I Spy. Be playful and think of amusing ways to play with your child.

Sincerely,

Your child's teacher

Help children get ready for kindergarten!

Build the home-school connection! Studies show that parent and family involvement with school is an important factor in children's later academic success. Many families of young children want to learn ways to support their little ones in preparing for and getting the most out of kindergarten.

With easy-to-share parent letters and simple, fun activities for families to do together at home, *Kick-Start Kindergarten Readiness* is the perfect tool for early childhood teachers to involve families in understanding and supporting the rich learning taking place in your preschool classroom.

The book offers activities to support:

- Social-emotional skills
- Math explorations
- Science inquiry
- Emerging literacy skills
- Language and vocabulary development
- Gross and fine motor skills



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