Educational Solutions for Children, Inc.

BUILDING STRONG READERS FROM BIRTH TO AGE FIVE!

ORAL LANGUAGE

LITERACY TOOLKIT

VOCABULARY



Created through funding provided by the Comprehensive Literacy Grant Initiative.

Supporting early literacy success for every child, every family, every community.

WELCOME, TEACHERS!

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Thank you for using the Oral Language Development Literacy Toolkit!

This toolkit is designed to support young children in developing strong oral language skills listening, speaking, understanding, and expressing ideas.

Oral language is the foundation for all later literacy success. When children have rich conversations and meaningful opportunities to communicate, they are better prepared for reading, writing, and learning in school and in life.

1 WHY ORAL LANGUAGE MATTERS

Oral language is the ability to understand and use spoken words to express thoughts, build relationships, and make meaning.

It is one of the most powerful building blocks for early literacy and future academic success.

Benefits Include:

- Strengthens listening and comprehension
- Expands vocabulary and word knowledge
- Supports phonological awareness
- Improves storytelling and expression
- Builds confidence and social skills
- Promotes school readiness and success

2 RESEARCH BASED BENEFITS



Research shows that strong oral language skills in the early years are the #1 predictor of future reading success across all grade levels (Birth–5 and beyond).



Children who develop rich vocabularies and strong listening and speaking skills understand more, learn more, and are better prepared for school.



High-quality conversations and meaningful talk help build critical thinking, social-emotional skills, and confidence in communicating with others.

3 HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT



1 EXPLORE
Review the activities and choose the ones that best fit your students' needs.



2 PREPARE
Gather a few materials and set up center or small group activities.



3 ENGAGE
Encourage rich conversations through play, songs, games, and books.



4 OBSERVE
Use observation tools to track progress and celebrate growth.

PERFECT FOR

- Classrooms
- Small Groups
- Intervention
- Home & Care Settings
- Family Engagement
- Early Learning Centers

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STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

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This toolkit aligns with key early learning and literacy standards that support print awareness and early literacy development.

BIRTH–3
(INFANTS & TODDLERS)

Early experiences with songs, rhymes, and books build the foundation for lifelong reading.

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Engages in back-and-forth interactions using sounds, words, and gestures.
- Responds to and enjoys finger plays, songs, and rhymes.
- Explores books and shows interest in pictures, print, and story.
- Demonstrates early understanding that print carries meaning.
- Develops attention and memory through repeated experiences.

PRESCHOOL
(3–5 YEARS)

Preschoolers strengthen print awareness and oral language through meaningful literacy experiences.

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Identifies that print carries meaning and has a purpose.
- Recognizes some letters, words, and signs in the environment.
- Understands that we read from left to right and top to bottom.
- Participates in shared reading and retelling of familiar rhymes.
- Uses vocabulary and oral language to express ideas and make connections.

PRE–K
(4–5 YEARS)

Pre-K children use their knowledge of print to connect language with meaning and purpose.

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Demonstrates understanding of basic concepts of print.
- Identifies letters and their associated sounds.
- Recognizes and produces rhyming words.
- Reads and understands high-frequency words.
- Retells stories and rhymes in sequence using key details.

KINDERGARTEN
(5–6 YEARS)

Kindergarteners apply print awareness skills to support reading comprehension and emergent writing.

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Demonstrates a deep understanding of concepts of print.
- Reads emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding.
- Uses phonological awareness skills to decode and encode words.
- Writes letters, words, and sentences to express ideas.
- Comprehends and retells nursery rhymes and connected text.

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MYSTERY BAG: DESCRIBE IT!

What is in the bag?

Students describe the object or picture using lots of details without naming it. We listen carefully and guess!

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ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

Focus:	Descriptive Vocabulary
Grades:	Preschool–Kindergarten
Time:	10–15 minutes
Group Size:	Whole Group, Small Group, Pairs

LEARNING FOCUS

Students will describe objects using details such as size, shape, color, texture, use, and more.

MATERIALS

- Mystery Bag (real bag or box)
- Object or Picture Cards
- Describing Prompts (optional)
- Pocket chart or flat surface

WHAT TO DO

1. Introduce the Mystery Bag and explain the activity.
2. Pull an object or picture from the bag.
3. Describe it using lots of words and details.
4. Ask students to guess what it is.
5. Encourage students to add their own describing words!

TEACHING TIP

Model rich, descriptive vocabulary.

"It is round."
"It is smooth."
"It can be red or green."
"We eat it."

Avoid saying the name too soon—let students think and describe!



LET'S EXPLORE THE MYSTERY BAG!

Directions: Pull an item from the mystery bag. Describe it using lots of detail words. Let your friends guess what it is!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did we learn about the object?
2. What words helped us guess?
3. How are the words we used helpful when we talk?
4. Can we think of another word to describe it?
5. What other things can we describe this way?



EXTENSION IDEAS

- Use picture cards for different themes "(animals, foods, toys, vehicles, etc.).
- Students take turns being the "describer."
- Encourage students to draw the item after describing it.
- Sort items by attributes (color, size, shape).
- Play Riddle Me! Give clues and let students guess.

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MYSTERY BAG QUESTION MARK

Directions: Cut out the question mark below.
Place it on the front of your mystery bag.



Cut along
the dotted line.



EXAMPLE:
Place the question mark on the front of your mystery bag!



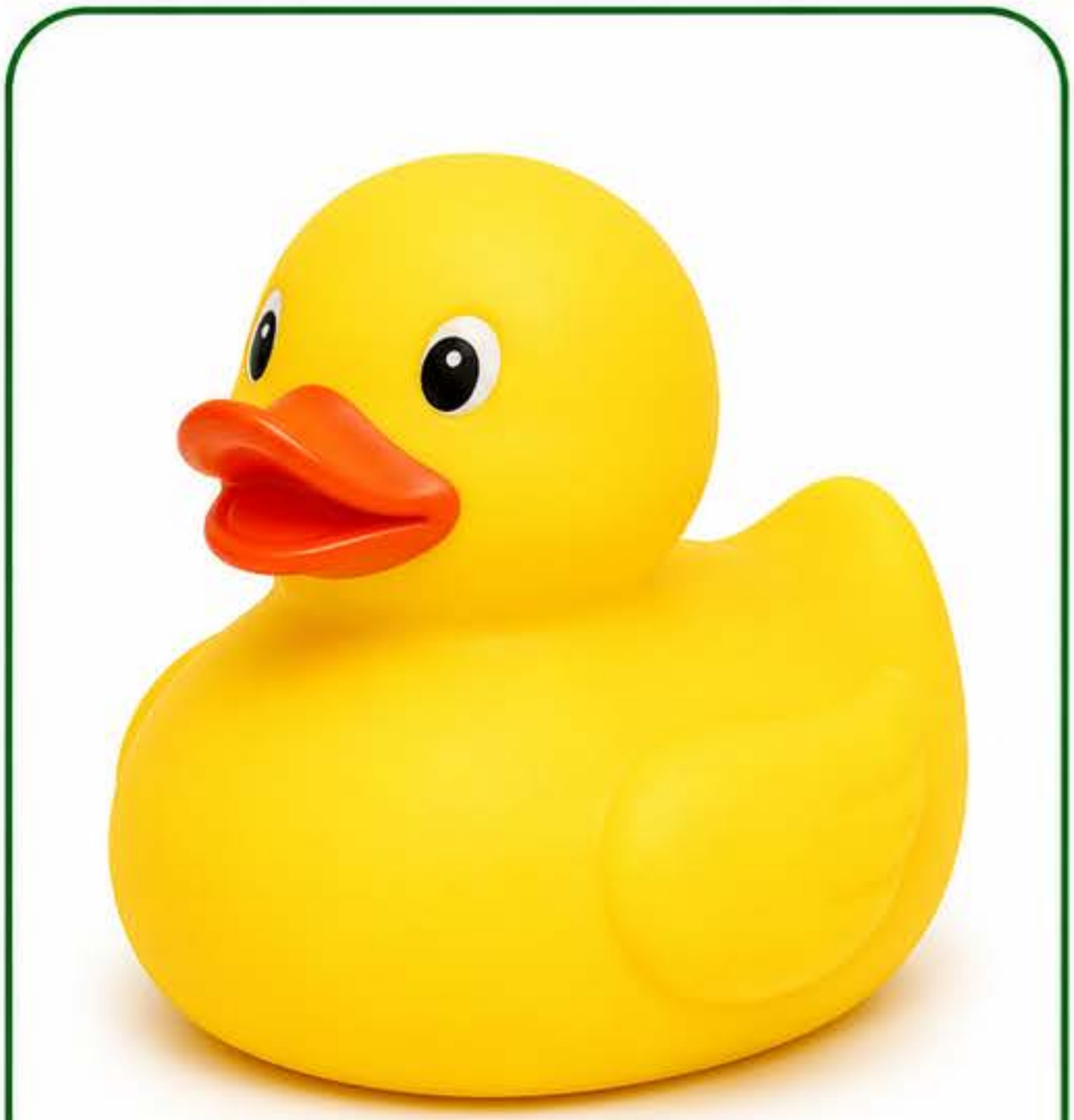




















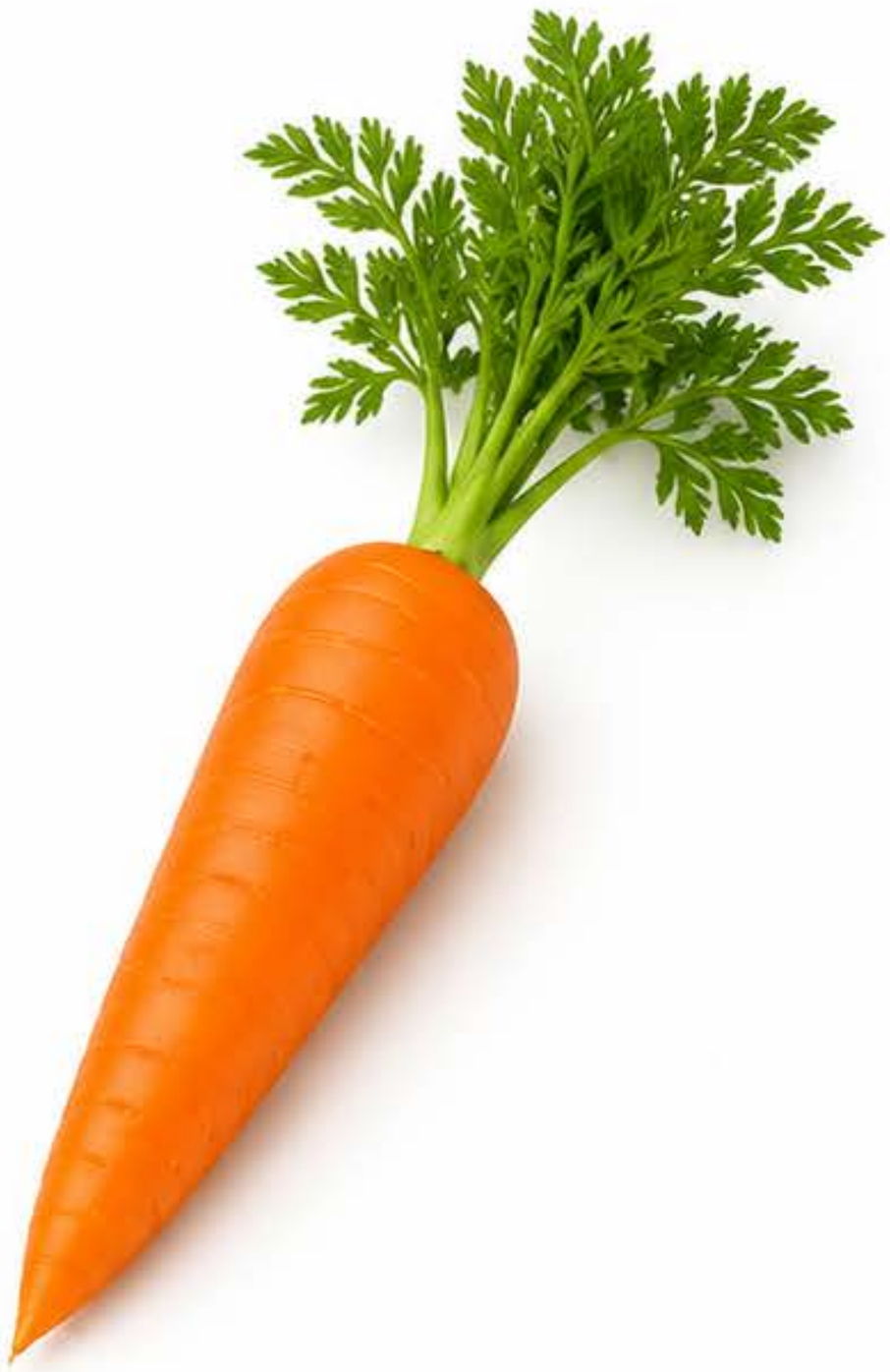


























VOCABULARY DETECTIVE:

What Does It Mean?

We are vocabulary detectives! We use clues to figure out what new words mean and how to use them.

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ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

Focus:	Word Meaning and Word Use
Grades:	Preschool–Kindergarten
Time:	10–15 minutes
Group Size:	Whole Group, Small Group, Pairs

LEARNING FOCUS

Students will determine the meaning of new vocabulary words using clues and practice using them in sentences.

MATERIALS

- Picture cards or real objects
- Sentence starter strips (optional)
- Chart paper or whiteboard

WHAT TO DO

1. Introduce the vocabulary word with a picture, object, or short scenario.
2. Give clues and discuss what the word means.
3. Restate the meaning in child-friendly language.
4. Brainstorm other examples of the word.
5. Practice using the word in a sentence.

TEACHING TIP

Use fun, engaging examples and act out words when possible.

"This is gigantic!"

"That was tiny!"

"The soup is hot."

Encourage students to use the new word in their own sentences.

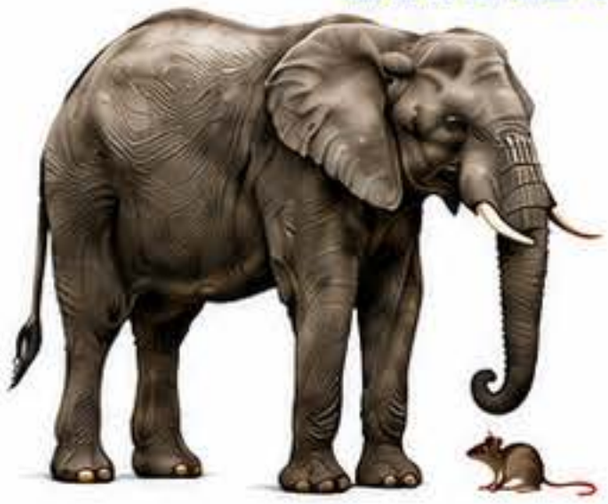
EXAMPLE WORD: ENORMOUS

Teacher:

"Look at this **enormous** elephant."

Enormous means **very, very big.**

What else could be enormous?"



Other examples:



a whale



a tall tree



a big house



a giant pumpkin

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did we learn about the word?
2. What clues helped us figure out what it means?
3. How can we use the word in a sentence?
4. Can we think of another example of something enormous?
5. What other words can we use to describe big things?



EXTENSION IDEAS

- Create a "Vocabulary Wall" with new words and pictures.
- Play "Big or Small?" using real objects.
- Students draw a picture of something enormous.
- Act out the word and have others guess what it means.

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ENORMOUS



TINY



FRIGID



SCORCHING



DELIGHTED



FURIOUS



EXHAUSTED



STARTLED



SWIFT



SLUGGISH



SOAKED



CROWDED



EMPTY



FULL



SHALLOW



DEEP



DELICATE



STURDY



FRAGILE



GIGANTIC



ROUGH



SMOOTH



VIBRANT



STIFF

PICTURE TALK

Tell Me More!

We look closely at a picture to notice details, describe what is happening, and share our ideas.

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ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

Focus:	Word Meaning and Word Use
Grades:	Preschool–Kindergarten
Time:	10–15 minutes
Group Size:	Whole Group, Small Group, Pairs

LEARNING FOCUS

Students will build oral language and vocabulary by observing a picture closely, describing what they see, discussing what is happening, and sharing their ideas.

MATERIALS

- Large, detailed picture (poster or chart)
- Prompt cards
- Pointer (optional)

WHAT TO DO

1. Show the picture and ask, "What do you notice?"
2. Listen to responses and ask, "Tell me more."
3. Ask follow-up questions:
   "What is happening?"
   "How do you know?"
   "What might happen next?"
4. Add new words to the conversation and model using them in sentences.
5. Encourage students to use the new words in their own sentences.

TEACHING TIP

Use fun, engaging examples and act out words when possible.

- *"What do you notice?"*
- *"Tell me more."*
- *"What is happening?"*
- *"How do you know?"*
- *"What might happen next?"*

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE PICTURE!



Look closely, What do you notice?

What do you notice?

Tell me more.

What is happening?

How do you know?

What might happen next?

Use the Teacher Prompt Cards to keep the conversation going!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did we learn about the word?
2. What clues helped us figure out what it means?
3. How can we use the word in a sentence?
4. Can we think of another example of something like this?
5. What other words can we use to describe what we see?

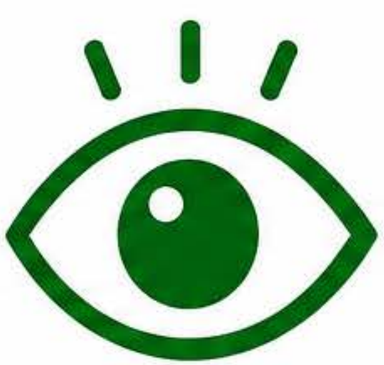


EXTENSION IDEAS

- Invite children to draw a part of the picture and tell about it.
- Act out what is happening using props or dramatic play.
- Use new words from the picture in your center and writing activities.

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TEACHER PROMPT CARDS



What do you notice?

Look closely. What details do you see?



Tell me more.

Can you say more about that?



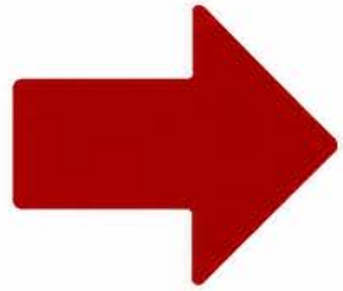
What is happening?

What do you think is going on in the picture?



How do you know?

What clues in the picture help you know that?



What might happen next?

What do you think will happen next? Why?

Cut out the cards to use as conversation reminders!


Fresh & Local
SUPPORT OUR FARMERS
DAIRY
thank you
FOR SHOPPING
WITH US!
2
CEREAL
BREAKFAST
SNACKS
POPCORN
3
PASTA
SAUCES
CANNED GOODS
BELL PEPPERS
$1.49 LB
TOMATOES
$1.79 LB
Organic
Organic


BE KIND
Our Class Rules
Be Kind
Listen
Take Turns
Share
Try Your Best
Reading Corner
I CAN
I can learn.
I can try.
I can do my best!


RIVERFRONT TRAIL
ENJOY • RESPECT • PROTECT
STAY RIGHT
Pass Left
SPEED
15
MPH
SPEED LIMIT
MPH
KEEP DOGS
ON LEASH
THANK YOU!
Together We Keep
Our Trail Beautiful

OPEN
FIRE RESCUE
A Stronger Community Grows Together
LIBRARY
POLICE
Fresh Lemonade 50¢
Kindness Makes Our Community Stronger!
COMMUNITY HELPER
We Our Commun


Tonight's Menu
- Grilled Chicken
- Veggie Pasta
- Garlic Bread
- Green Salad


X O X
O X O
X O X

WHICH ONE DOESN'T BELONG?

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We look at a set of pictures, think about how they are alike and different, and explain our thinking.

ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

Focus:	Vocabulary, Categories, Reasoning
Grades:	Preschool–Kindergarten
Time:	10–15 minutes
Group Size:	Whole Group, Small Group, Pairs

LEARNING FOCUS

Students will build vocabulary and critical thinking skills by identifying which one picture does not belong and explaining why, using complete sentences.

MATERIALS

- Picture Cards (sets of 4)
- Prompt Cards
- Chart paper or whiteboard (optional)
- Pointer (optional)

WHAT TO DO

1. Show a set of four picture cards.
2. Ask, "Which one doesn't belong?"
3. Ask students to explain their thinking using a complete sentence.
4. Listen to different ideas and ask follow-up questions.
5. Continue with additional sets that may have more than one correct answer.

TEACHING TIP

Encourage students to explain their thinking.

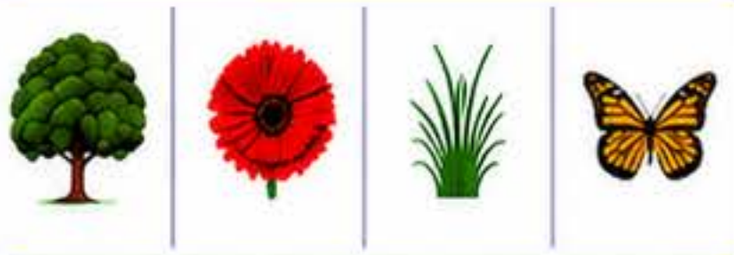
Use sentence stems to support responses:

- *"The ___ doesn't belong because ..."*
- *"I see that ___, but I think ..."*
- *"Another answer could be ___ because ..."*

LET'S TRY IT!







DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which one doesn't belong? Why?
2. How are the other three alike?
3. How is the one that doesn't belong different from the others?
4. Can you think of another one that could be the answer? Why?
5. How do you know?



EXTENSION IDEAS

- ★ Create your own sets of four pictures for a friend.
- ★ Sort classroom objects and create "Which One Doesn't Belong?" challenges.
- ★ Draw your own set of four pictures and explain your thinking.

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LET'S TRY IT!

































LET'S TRY IT!

































LET'S TRY IT!

















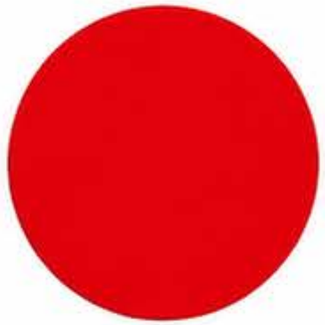


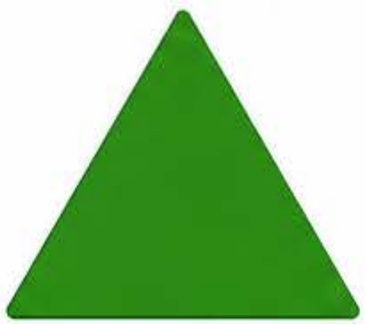






LET'S TRY IT!



















5

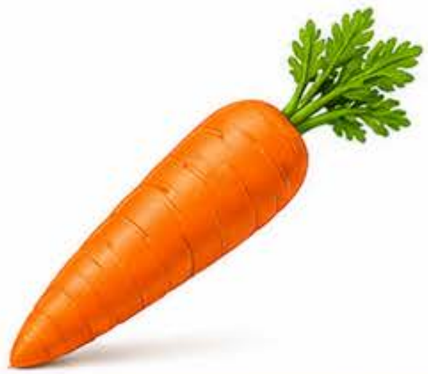
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WORD CONNECTIONS: WHAT GOES TOGETHER?

Students sort pictures that have a meaningful relationship and explain how they are connected.

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ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

Focus:	Oral Language, Vocabulary, Reasoning, Relationships
Grades:	Preschool–Kindergarten
Time:	15–20 minutes
Group Size:	Whole Group, Small Group, Pairs

LEARNING FOCUS

Students will identify and describe how pictures are related by sorting them into groups and explaining the connection.

MATERIALS

- Picture Cards (various everyday items)
- Sorting Mats or chart paper
- Markers (optional)

WHAT TO DO

1. Spread out all the picture cards.
2. Look at each card and think about what it goes with.
3. Sort the cards into groups that make sense.
4. Give each group a name or label.
5. Explain how the items in each group are connected.

TEACHING TIP

Ask prompts to encourage explanation and vocabulary:

- *"Why do these go together?"*
- *"How are they connected?"*
- *"Can you think of something else that goes with them?"*

OPEN SORT!

Look at all of the pictures. Sort them into groups that go together.
There may be more than one group. Explain how your groups are connected.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did you put these pictures together?
2. How are the items in your group connected?
3. Can you think of something else that could go in your group?
4. What other groups could we make with these?
5. How did you decide?



EXTENSION IDEAS

- Have students draw something that goes with one of the groups they made.
- Use the groups to create a class book about how things are connected.
- Take photos of the groups and revisit them to add more items later.








FLOWER
SEEDS





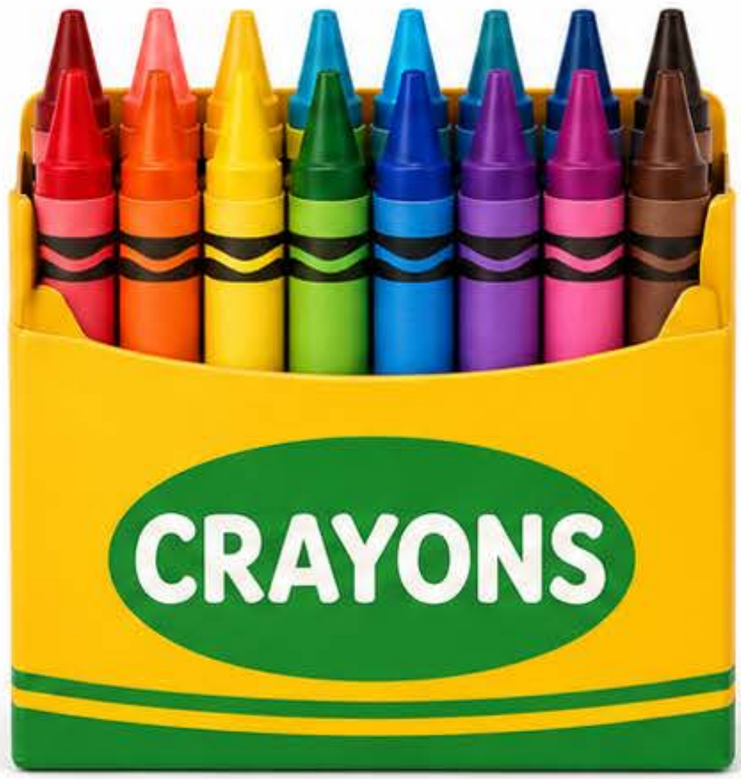











CRAYONS










































SCHOOL


H
HOSPITAL
EMERGENCY


GROCERY


FIRE STATION




















TOOTHPASTE
CAVITY PROTECTION




DENTAL
FLOSS
MINT






















CRAYONS




FIREFIGHTER
27






POLICE


























5
4
3
2
1
oz
150
120
90
60
30
ml







FAMILY CONNECTION

STRONG ORAL LANGUAGE TODAY. STRONG COMMUNICATORS TOMORROW.

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TALK

Use new words every day.

- Ask, "What happened first?"
- Encourage your child to explain.
- Listen and build on their ideas.

LOOK

Notice and name words.

- Point out and name things you see.
- Explore picture books together and talk about what you see.
- Find new and interesting words.

DESCRIBE

Use words to describe.

- Describe how things look, feel, sound, smell, and taste.
- Use words like big, soft, noisy, sweet, and rough.
- Ask your child to describe their day.

ACT

Move, pretend, and use your imagination.

- Pretend with puppets, toys, or dress-up.
- Act out stories you read together.
- Take turns being different characters.

FAMILY CHALLENGE

Try these oral language activities all week long!

- [ ] Have a conversation at dinner with no screens.
- [ ] Go on a "word hunt" and find as many new words as you can.
- [ ] Read a story and retell it together in your own words.
- [ ] Play "Would You Rather?" and explain your choices.
- [ ] Share a favorite memory and ask your child to share one too.

Great talk builds bright futures!

TRY THIS TONIGHT!

- Talk about something you did together today.
- Ask your child to teach you something they know.
- Tell a story from your own childhood.
- Use a new word in a sentence and encourage your child to try it.
- End the day by sharing one thing you're grateful for.

"You are helping your child's voice grow!"

TOGETHER, WE BUILD CONFIDENCE, SKILLS, AND A LOVE OF LEARNING!

Thank you for being a part of your child's learning journey!

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OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to observe and celebrate children as they develop oral language skills that support communication, vocabulary, and listening.



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Child's Name: _____ Date: _____ Observer: _____

SKILLS TO OBSERVE	CONSISTENTLY (Most of the time)	SOMETIMES (With support)	NOT YET (Needs more practice)	NOTES
1 Uses words to express needs and wants	○	○	○	_____
2 Uses new vocabulary in conversations	○	○	○	_____
3 Asks and answers questions	○	○	○	_____
4 Follows directions with understanding	○	○	○	_____
5 Retells a story or event in order	○	○	○	_____
6 Describes people, places, and things	○	○	○	_____
7 Uses complete sentences	○	○	○	_____
8 Takes turns and listens to others	○	○	○	_____
9 Participates in group discussions	○	○	○	_____
10 Uses words to solve problems or conflicts	○	○	○	_____
11 Expresses ideas and opinions	○	○	○	_____
12 Shows interest in listening to stories and conversations	○	○	○	_____

STRENGTHS I OBSERVED:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

NEXT STEPS:

- ★ Introduce new vocabulary in meaningful ways.
- ★ Encourage your child to ask and answer questions.
- ★ Create opportunities for conversations every day.
- ★ Celebrate progress and keep building confidence!

WHAT CAN HELP:

- ✓ Daily conversations and active listening
- ✓ Reading together and talking about stories
- ✓ Asking open-ended questions
- ✓ Expanding on your child's ideas
- ✓ Songs, rhymes, and finger plays
- ✓ Playful pretend and role-play
- ✓ Positive praise and encouragement

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