

# Children and Families Commission of Orange County Early Literacy Development Guidelines for Children Ages 0-5

*Orange County children deserve the best. To get a good start in school and life, they must be good listeners, speakers, readers, and writers. The Children and Families Commission of Orange County convened the Early Literacy Task Force in 2003 to examine current research, national/state reading initiatives, and local resources in order to develop literacy guidelines and descriptions of best practices.*

Best Practices for Early Literacy Development for:

- Parents and Day Care Providers
- Early Childhood Teachers
- Physicians, Nurses, and Other Health Care Providers
- Kindergarten Teachers
- Community Organizations

are available at  
[www.occhildrenandfamilies.com](http://www.occhildrenandfamilies.com)



The Commission offers the following Guidelines for those interacting with children ages birth to five. Early Literacy development efforts should:

**1**

**Be comprehensive and age-appropriate for young children.** Literacy includes listening, speaking, writing, and reading activities that are appropriate for a child's age. Literacy development also includes activities to foster children's social, emotional, and physical development.

**2**

**Acknowledge that young children learn in different ways but all build on prior learning.** Each child is unique, with an individual pattern and timing of development influenced by family and life experiences; however, new understanding builds on prior understanding.

**3**

**Individualize decisions about next steps for listening, speaking, writing, and reading.** Observations of young children's literacy activities enable parents and educators to plan future literacy actions.

**4**

**Support the use of home language for children and families and, if needed, acquisition of English.** Young children who have rich language experiences, regardless of the language, will more easily acquire English and learn to read fluently.

**5**

**Base literacy activities on research and best practices in early childhood education.** When adults use proven and effective methods, children will become good listeners, speakers, writers, and readers.

**6**

**Create positive, secure, and engaging learning environments.** Children's desire to be literate for their own enjoyment, information and communication should be nurtured and promoted.

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While infants and toddlers do not read, they eagerly acquire listening and speaking skills that will help them become readers. Three- and four-year-olds expand their literacy skills as they converse, enjoy words and stories, and write pretend letters. Adults encourage children to be good readers by practicing the six early literacy guidelines shown above.

When we are clear about what we should do, and why we should do it, it is more likely that we will accomplish our goals. When children expand their language skills and become socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually developed, their adjustment in elementary school will be easier and their success more assured. When all adults who interact with young children work together on early literacy, children will be the better for it!

# Best Practices for Early Literacy Development for Kindergarten Teachers



These descriptions offer some ways early childhood educators may support young children’s literacy development. The Background Section offers information about why these activities are important. Please refer to the Endnotes for noted numbers and letters.

John is a kindergarten teacher who works closely with the preschool teachers on campus and with several neighborhood family child care providers.<sup>5</sup> They share professional development opportunities, meet twice a month to look at students’ work, and share ideas about curriculum, instruction, and assessment.<sup>5</sup> Building on previous experiences at home, family child care or preschool, John plans a unit to expand the children’s knowledge about farm animals.<sup>2</sup> He assesses their knowledge about the topic, especially for those children who were not present during the springtime Kindergarten Round-up, and leads a lesson for all the children.<sup>3</sup> For the farm unit, he plans lessons and activities for children to achieve standards in mathematics, language arts, science, art, and social studies and he emphasizes English vocabulary<sup>F</sup>. During the kindergarten year, the children will also study wild animals of their area and learn characteristics of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. John uses observations and assessments to make sure children are reaching kindergarten academic standards in the various subject areas.<sup>3</sup>

John teaches reading in small groups, using his district’s adopted curricular materials. He introduces concepts and vocabulary and they read together from a small controlled vocabulary book.<sup>A,D,H</sup> Then children re-read it in unison, followed by

each child reading out loud.<sup>D</sup> The book becomes part of the choices they have for individualized reading time.<sup>A</sup> Children receive a small-sized copy of the book to take home and read to family members.<sup>4</sup> On some days, John passes out letter tiles and students build words, based on his clues.<sup>E,H,K</sup> To help them learn the structure of factual books,<sup>J</sup> the whole class discusses similarities and differences of two related books on farm animals.

Children have choices for practice and application in centers after their lessons.<sup>1</sup> They include the following:

**Mathematics Center:** Children roll a die, place the appropriate number of cow figures on a sheet of paper drawn into “pens” (boxes), and then write the mathematics sentence, i.e.,  
5 = 3 cows + 2 cows or 4 cows + 1 cow.<sup>1</sup> They compare their answers to determine if they agree and how many different mathematics sentences were possible for each numeral.<sup>B,C</sup>

**Science Center:** The children plant wheat seeds in containers and chart their growth over time. They enter their observations in their science journals and discuss their findings with the center volunteer and at Circle Time with the whole class.<sup>B,C,I,1,4,5</sup>

**Art Center:** Children learn the technique of crayon resist. They draw farm animals and then brush watercolor over the top. When it dries, they write the names of the animals on sentence strips and mount them on the Art Bulletin Board.<sup>C,I,1,5</sup>

**Language Arts Center:** Children have a variety of simple books with controlled vocabulary on farm animals. Most have been read in class before, so children re-read to each other in pairs.<sup>A,D,H</sup> They play board games with the vocabulary cards they have learned.<sup>D</sup> They also have tagboard flip books that help children substitute sounds and expand their vocabulary about word families, i.e., “pig” on successive pages becomes “dig,” “jig,” and “big.”<sup>G,H</sup> Several choose to play phonics games in which they choose from a stack of laminated pictures those that begin with a particular sound.<sup>G</sup> Then they place on the picture the correct magnet letter for the beginning sound.<sup>H</sup> John checks their work before they put the pictures away.<sup>3</sup> The children learn how to read and spell simple words that

they enter, with a parent volunteer’s help, into their dictionaries.<sup>K</sup>

**Listening Center:** Children follow along in a book about the farm, using their fingers to track the words.<sup>A,B</sup> A classroom volunteer helps them to keep their places. After listening, the children will each find their favorite page, rewrite the sentence in their language arts journal, and illustrate it.<sup>1</sup> They will share with the class at Circle Time.<sup>C</sup>

**Writing Center:** Several children use clipboards and paper to record the words they see in the classroom.<sup>1</sup> Others write stories or observations in their journals using temporary or invented spelling and individualized dictionaries.<sup>F,H,K</sup> John uses these journals as one method to assess children’s development of sound-symbol relationships.<sup>I,2,3</sup> A few students complete a form to be shared at Circle Time about a book they just finished. Their “report” will stimulate other students’ interest in the book.<sup>C,D,I</sup>

During whole group Physical Education time, children move on the playground from one hula hoop “farm animal pen” to others by skipping, hopping, running, and other motions. Each “pen” is labeled with a picture and name of an animal.<sup>A,D,1,2,4,6</sup>

**Circle Time:** The children will learn and sing several songs about the farm animals, changing the beginning sounds of the animal names so that they practice the phonemic awareness skill of sound substitution.<sup>G</sup> Some students share their Book Reports and favorite pages from books they read during the day.<sup>B,C,E</sup> John engages them in a spirited reading of the Word Wall.<sup>A,B,C,D,H,I</sup>

John continues the Interactive Writing process the children learned in preschool. Now they write longer sentences and children take more of the writing responsibility.<sup>C,I,K</sup> Each child has a blank dictionary in which he writes important words.<sup>K</sup> These words are used in creative writing experiences.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the room are charts, diagrams, and class-developed reminders about alphabet letters and their sounds, punctuation and grammar rules, reading strategies, and other ways that children may help themselves or others with reading and writing.<sup>D,H,I,K</sup>

Since many of the children are learning English, John teaches vocabulary and grammar in an active, meaning-making manner.<sup>1</sup> Children take a trip to a nearby farm at the beginning of the farm animal unit. They previously filled out a chart on what they knew and wanted to know about the animals. After the trip, they complete the chart on what they learned.<sup>D,1</sup> John extends the field trip with photographs, posters, and

recordings that help children remember the experience, reinforce new vocabulary,<sup>E,4</sup> and apply what they have learned.<sup>2</sup> The children use the ripened grains of wheat (plus additional flour) to make flour tortillas or a loaf of bread.<sup>1,6</sup> Children have discussions in table groups about how their families prepare bread, noodles, or tortillas.<sup>C,4</sup> John reads from “Bread, Bread, Bread” by Ann Morris.<sup>A</sup> They each write sentences

using the format: “I like \_\_\_\_ on my tortilla (or bread).”<sup>1</sup>

In the afternoon children read from a notebook filled with simple poetry for choral reading.<sup>A,6</sup> They have parts for boys, girls, solos, and unison reading. The choral reading emphasizes their expanding knowledge about sounds, letters, words, and fluency, as the sheer fun of reading together.<sup>D,E,F,G,H,1,4,6</sup>

## Background

Similar to Best Practices for Early Childhood Educators, kindergarten teachers also learn about current research and appropriate instructional techniques regarding children’s development in all areas by attending conferences, participating in grade level and cross-grade level meetings, sharing professional discussions about student work, reading journal articles, and mentoring peers.

Kindergarten teachers determine strengths and needs of young children and use this information to plan curriculum and instruction that enables children to achieve academic standards in all subject areas in an active, hands-on and minds-on way. Planned classroom experiences also help children to develop socially, emotionally, and physically. Kindergarten teachers integrate curriculum so that several academic and development areas are addressed in one unit. They frequently observe children and their efforts to determine if they are making adequate progress. They work with other professionals to prevent children with learning diffi-

culties from “slipping between the cracks.”

The kindergarten learning environment helps children feel secure while they learn new things. Teachers use active, hands-on learning experiences to help children build on prior knowledge and make sense of new concepts, vocabulary, and skills. The room is organized for learning, with materials from which children may choose that help them build their knowledge and skills about listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers include parents in an active way in extending lessons, supporting reading, learning how to help their children, and understanding their children’s progress. Teachers and administrators also involve the community in the school. Classroom teachers are sensitive to issues of language and culture, regardless of their own language background and cultural heritage. Kindergarten teachers realize that the fun, playful, respectful, and purposeful environment they plan for the class helps build children’s security and success.

## Endnotes

### Literacy skills or concepts used:

- A. Read to/with/by children from a variety of fiction, nonfiction, poetry
- B. Listening for a purpose or to understand detail
- C. Shared conversations
- D. Fluency and Comprehension
- E. Vocabulary
- F. Concepts about print
- G. Phonemic awareness (sounds and rhythms of words and letters)
- H. Phonics (sound-symbol relationships)
- I. Writing for a purpose, penmanship
- J. Knowledge of story structure and narrative structure
- K. Spelling and Grammar

### Early Literacy Development Guidelines utilized:

1. Be comprehensive and age-appropriate for young children.
2. Acknowledge that young children learn in different ways but all build on prior learning.
3. Individualize decisions about next steps for listening, speaking, writing, and reading.
4. Support the use of home language for children and families and, if needed, their acquisition of English.
5. Base literacy experience on research and best practices in early childhood education.
6. Create positive, secure, and engaging learning environments.