

The Power of the Pen: Drawing and Scribbling



When young children draw or scribble, they are using the skills they will need for writing. To keep momentum strong, it is important to provide positive feedback to all their efforts. You can support preschoolers' first efforts to write in several ways.

Encourage young children to draw.

- Make sure children have drawing materials and plenty of time to use them. Drawing materials should be available daily during centers or free choice times.
- When a child has made a drawing, print their name in one corner. You might say each letter: "A-V-A spells Ava. I wrote your name!"
- If a child is not yet able to write their whole name, encourage them to write just the first letter. Finish writing their name while saying the remaining letters. You wrote the "J" and I added "O" and "N." Now it says "Jon."
- Pay attention to a child's effort to copy their name. "Oh, you worked on writing your name, Alex. There is the A, and there is the L."
- Remember that children express ideas and tell stories with their drawings. You can help a child connect print with spoken words when you invite them to dictate something about their picture while you write what they say on a piece of paper. Having trouble getting started? You might ask, "What's going on in your picture?" or "What name do you want to give your drawing?" Point to each word as you read back the dictation.

Let children scribble!

- Keep in mind that a scribbler isn't just creating random lines and loops. They are practicing what it's like to communicate on paper. The child might not want to let others see their efforts if, for example, an older sibling talks about scribbling in an insulting way. You can help by talking about their scribbles as "working on your writing."
- Encourage scribblers to use their scribbling skills during dramatic play to make signs, play money, or pretend mail. "You made a sign for your store telling customers you open at noon." "You put a letter in the mail and sent it to your grandma."
- Talk to a child about their scribbles. You might ask, "How did you get the crayon to make that line?" "What did you think about saying?" Comment about marks they have made: "That one looks like the D in De'andre's name." "Did you enjoy making all those swirls?"
- If a child shows you some scribbles and asks you, "What did I write?", you might try asking, "What do you want it to say?" or "What were you thinking about when you were working on it?"

Display children's drawings and scribbles.

- Label children's artwork with descriptions dictated by the children.
- Talk to parents about the important role that drawing and scribbling play as a child learns to write.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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