

Out and About with Preschoolers: Literacy Activities



It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. Here are some great ideas for embedding literacy skills into your outdoor activities.

Take a casual walk

- Encourage the children to look around for letters, words, signs, and symbols. Bring a clipboard and help them to make a list of what they see to share later. Take pictures of signs and symbols. Print them out to display in the classroom.
- Help the children categorize the different signs that they see (advertisements, announcements, warning signs, directional signs).
- Discuss what the children notice in ways that expand their vocabularies: “Kayla noticed a bird’s nest on the blue awning above the store entrance!” “Amir noticed a warning sign on the gazebo. It tells people not to feed the squirrels.”
- Pause to talk about interesting things. Is the bakery especially fragrant? Invite everyone to take a sniff and describe the aroma. Are leaves falling? Collect specimens for discussion and study. Has it rained or snowed lately? How can you tell?
- After the walk, ask the children to dictate a report about it together. Help them think about sequence in storytelling: “What did we do first, next, after that, last?” Children can draw illustrations to represent different events from their walk and compile them into a book.

Stay on the grounds

- Write simple notes for children in the sandbox: “Hi!” “Sing B-I-N-G-O.” Help them identify letters and sound out the message. Children can write their names in dirt or sand. They can also “paint” words on the building or sidewalk by using a paintbrush dipped in water. Read them quickly before they dry and disappear!
- Tell stories outdoors. Be sure everyone has a comfortable place to sit and can hear you easily. (A librarian can help you find stories about the outdoors to learn and share with children.)
- Invite children to pair up and sit back to back so they can each see a different part of the grounds. (Allow space if children do not feel comfortable leaning on or touching a peer.) Let them spend 2–5 minutes carefully drawing what they see, in silence. Then give them a few minutes to share their drawings and tell their partners about two or three things that they saw.
- Collaborate on a poem about being outdoors. Suggest that the children lie on their backs and focus for 30 seconds on what is above them. Ask them to report details of what they noticed. “How would you describe the sounds you heard? What did you see? What could you feel?” Help children write their descriptive words on a personal whiteboard or clipboard with paper. Help the group as they arrange their descriptive words into a poem to display for families.

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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