

Predicting: Helping Preschoolers Look Ahead



When we make predictions, we form ideas about the future based on what we've already seen or done. Preschool children are beginning to notice patterns, sequences, and connections that help them guess what to expect from the world around them. Prediction skills are important in literacy, math, science, and social development. Here are ways to encourage a child's disposition to make predictions.



Model different ways to make predictions.

Use words such as *predict*, *guess*, *expect*: “Today you voted to have muffins for snack, so you’re *expecting* to eat muffins. However, we have only one tablespoon of sugar. I *predict* that won’t be enough sugar for the muffin recipe and that we will need to make a substitution in our recipe. Luckily, we have plenty of honey and we can use that.”



Help children make connections to earlier experiences.

Try asking them questions with phrases such as “remember when” or “think back”: “Can you think back to what the muffins were like when we forgot to use apple sauce instead of sugar? Do you remember if you thought they looked good and tasted good?”



Help children imagine possibilities.

Ask “what if” questions: “What might happen if we use honey in the muffins today?” “Do you think they will taste sweeter or less sweet than when we used sugar?” “Do you think they will taste the same or different than when we used applesauce?”



Invite children to explain their predictions.

Ask a follow-up question when a child makes a prediction: “Mike, you predict the muffins will feel sticky when we use honey. What makes you think so?” “Winona, you think the muffins will be smaller when we use honey than when we used applesauce. Tell us how you made that prediction.”



Encourage children to comment on each other's ideas.

Summarize and restate their ideas as needed: “Winona is guessing that using honey will make the batter sweet enough to taste good. Jaya, what do you think about that?”



Help children to decide what to try and to make a plan.

Help them vote or reach a consensus: “The cooks voted to experiment with using honey in the muffin batter today. Rashad says we should have a taste test!”



Emphasize “testing” and “checking” instead of being right.

When children revisit their predictions, use words such as *surprise* and *expected*: “Was anyone surprised when they tasted the muffins?” “Joo-Yun says she expected flat, sticky muffins. But she checked them out, and they look and taste like regular muffins.”

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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