

For the Birds: Nests and Seeds



Reading aloud, singing, doing fingerplays and engaging young children in conversation are all ways that parents and caregivers lay the foundation for young children to become successful readers and writers. The following activities were created to promote literacy with young children through hands-on, real-life experiences that will stimulate learning.

Have fun and “Grow a Reader!”

LOOK AT A BIRD’S NEST

If you are lucky enough to find a bird’s nest on the ground, bring in the nest and put it on a tray. Give the children disposable gloves, tweezers and magnifying glasses to carefully take apart the nest and study it. Be sure to have everyone wash hands thoroughly afterwards, even if they have worn gloves.

Things to think about and discuss:

Can you tell what the birds used to build their nests?

Do all birds use the same materials?

Which material was used most by the birds?

Where do you think the birds found the material?

How did they get it from where they found it to the nest?

How does the nest stay together?

BIRDS WEAVE NESTS

Birds use many kinds of materials to weave a nest. Encourage the children to try some weaving. Expect their first experiences with weaving to be lumpy, random, and often tangled. The results will still be wonderful!

FENCE WEAVING

You will need:

Weaving materials such as

Lengths of fabric scraps

Ribbon

Construction tape

Plastic bags

Yarn

Twine or string

Raffia

Access to a chain-link fence (Weave materials through a laundry basket if you don't have a fence.)

Weave one of the materials into the fence, working it over and under the links. Try different kinds of material. Do they feel different? Is one type easier to weave than another?

BIRD'S NEST SALAD*

Ingredients:

1 grated carrot

½ cup canned Chinese crunchy chow mein noodles

Mayonnaise to moisten

Peas or grapes



Grate a carrot. Mix the carrot with ½ cup canned Chinese noodles and mayonnaise to moisten. Put a mound of this salad on a plate and push in the middle with a spoon to form a nest. Add peas or grapes.

*** All cooking projects require adult supervision.**

BIRDS EYE VIEW OF BIRDSEED

Put birdseed in small bowls.

Invite children to look at the birdseed with magnifying glasses.

How many different colors do they see?

Are there different sizes?

Different shapes?

BIRDSEED COLLAGES

You will need:

- Birdseed (usually least expensive when purchased from a grocery or discount store)
- Container to hold the birdseed such as a margarine tub or pie tin
- Heavy paper such as tag board, card board or a paper plate
- White glue
- Glue applicator (glue brush, craft stick, etc.)

What you do:

- Children apply glue to paper and sprinkle birdseed over the glue.
- *For variation*, use additional types of seeds such as corn and sunflower seeds.

Tip: To help with clean up, spread a shower curtain or old sheet under the table. When you are done, fold up the sheet with any loose birdseed and shake it off outside or take it to the trash. Or, do the whole project outdoors!



BIRDSEED BASKET FEEDER

You will need:

grapefruit (or large orange)
yarn
birdseed
berries
bread crumbs
knife
spoon



What you do:

1. Help the children cut a grapefruit or orange into halves.
2. Scoop out and eat the delicious fruit.
3. Poke three holes on the rim of each empty grapefruit half.
4. Thread one piece of yarn through each hole, and tie a knot on the ends inside the grapefruit.
5. Tie the three pieces of yarn together at the top. The grapefruit should now look like a basket.
6. Fill the baskets with treats birds like to eat, such as birdseed, berries, and bread-crumbs.
7. Hang the baskets from a tree branch. Refill the baskets when empty.



TWO LITTLE BLACKBIRDS FINGERPLAY



Two little blackbirds sitting on a hill,
(close fists, extend index fingers)

One named Jack. One named Jill.

(wiggle one finger, then the other finger)

Fly away Jack. Fly away Jill.

(move index fingers behind shoulders or back one at a time)

Come back Jack. Come back Jill.

(move hands back separately with index fingers extended)

Variation: Change the names and make up appropriate actions.

Two little blackbirds sitting in the snow, one named Fast and one named Slow.

Sitting on a cloud, one named Soft and one named Loud.

Sitting on Dad, one named Happy, one named Sad.

BIRD NEST ACTIVITIES

- Find a large cardboard box and allow children to use it as a pretend nest or a hole in a tree. The children can “fly” in and out of the box.

In spring and early summer, children can provide nesting material for birds by:

- stuffing a mesh sack for onions or tomatoes with such things as pet fur, bits of cloth, yarn cut into short lengths, dryer lint, stuffing from an old pillow, hay, even hair from a brush. Snip a few holes in the sack so birds can poke around, then hang the sack in a tree.
- giving children a brown paper lunch bag and taking the children on a walk. Along the way, have the children put items into their bags that birds might use to build nests. When you return from the walk, help children turn down the edges of their bags to form nests. Have children place their bags outside so that birds can use the items for nest building.
- lightly weaving short pieces of yarn or string around the outsides of pinecones. To make hangers, use pipe cleaners and twist them into loops around the pinecones. Hang the pinecones on outdoor branches for birds to find.

MAKE YOUR OWN BIRD NESTS

What You Need:

- Mud
- Sticks, twigs, pine needles, or pebbles
- Grass or leaves



What You Do:

After showing the children real birds nests if possible, or pictures of real bird nests, take the children outside or on a walk to collect mud, sticks, grass, leaves, twigs, pine needles, and pebbles. Let the children create their own bird nests.

This activity can be messy, but it is worth it! Try this project outside or prepare your space inside with a drop cloth under a table. Use shallow cardboard boxes (such as those used to display soda cans) to contain the nesting materials and the nests. Margarine tubs may also be used to hold the nests.

LEARNING TO FLY

A mother bird has been sitting on her nest of eggs. One day the eggs hatch, and the mother bird busies herself with finding food and feeding her babies. At last she decides they are big enough to learn to fly. She flies around the nest and shows her babies how it is done. Soon all the little birds are flying but one, who is afraid. How can the mother bird get her baby to fly?

Read the above story. Have the children come up with possible solutions and write down their ideas, for example, “by sending up a cat to scare the baby into flying away,” or “by having two other birds hold onto the baby’s wings to help him fly.” Encourage the children to retell the story with the agreed-upon ending, acting out as many elements of the story as they can (flapping their baby wings and so on.)

“WINGS OF A BIRD”

Flying fast, flying slow
Soaring high, swooping low
Swirling and twirling, and gliding through the air
The wings of a bird travel everywhere.

Read this poem to the children. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine they are birds flying through the air. Then ask them to stand up and imitate the birds as you read the poem again.

Literacy Connection:

For additional descriptive language about a bird in flight, read Little Green by Keith Baker



Bring the books to life with these simple ideas that highlight early literacy skills.

Are You My Mother? By P.D. Eastman

Presentation Notes: A young bird hatches and goes in search of his mother in this classic reader. Because the print lines are widely spaced, move your finger underneath each line as you read it to encourage print awareness. Also show a letter M and talk about how it is the first letter of the word “mother”; ask the children for more “m” words.

Skills: Print Awareness, Letter Knowledge

The Birdwatchers by Simon James

Presentation Notes: Granddad tells Jess all about the crazy things that happen when he goes bird watching, but when Jess finally gets to go he is a little surprised. While reading, use different voices to help differentiate the two characters. Point out the silliness in Granddad’s stories and take time to let them observe and appreciate the humor in the illustrations and text. This may inspire them to tell their own funny bird stories or just reinforce the fun of picture books!

Skills: Narrative, Print Motivation

Mother for Choco by Keiko Kasza

Presentation Notes: Choco is looking for someone to be his mother in this gentle and charming story about adoption. In his quest, he meets various animals. Sequential stories like this help develop narrative skills. Help the children to recount his meetings in sequence either verbally or with flannel pieces or props. Use the theme of the story to launch a discussion about families, mothers and love.

Skills: Narrative, Vocabulary

Nest Full of Eggs by Priscilla Belz Jenkins

Presentation Notes:

Looking out their bedroom window, a boy and girl discover robins building a nest. Their observations told as a story convey plenty of facts about robins, eggs and eventually the hatching! Non-fiction books like this provide new vocabulary especially pages 18-19 which identify different bird feathers.

Skills Featured: Vocabulary, Narrative

Little Green by Keith Baker

Presentation Notes:

A boy watches a hummingbird from his window and describes the movement he sees. The rich, lyrical language will help build vocabulary. Pair this book with the “Wings of a Bird” activity and during a second reading, have children imitate the birds in the book. Make sure to shift the book and point to the text when the bird is “hovering in the air” as this is a great example of how to build your children’s awareness of print.

Skills Featured: Print Awareness, Vocabulary

Flap Your Wings by PD Eastman

Presentation Notes: When two birds discover a strange large egg in their nest, they decide to take care of it as their own. After reading the story, talk about events at the beginning, middle and end. Use puppets or other props for a lively retelling.

Skills Featured: Narrative, Print Motivation

MORE GREAT BOOKS

No Roses for Harry by Gene Zion

Who Will Sing a Lullaby by Dee Lillegard

The Perfect Nest by Catherine Friend

Little Robin Redbreast illustrated by Shari Halpern

Baby Bird’s First Nest by Frank Asch