



Kathy MacMillan & Christine Kirker

# KINDERGARTEN MAGIC

Theme-Based Lessons for Building Literacy and Library Skills

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Building Literacy and Library Skills

Kathy MacMillan and Christine Kirker

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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are available online at [alaeditions.org/webextras](http://alaeditions.org/webextras).


# Introduction

**LESS TIME**, fewer resources . . . and more time with students, along with higher expectations from administrators. Sound familiar? With schools all over the country implementing full-day kindergarten programs, and higher expectations generated by No Child Left Behind, already overtaxed school librarians are doubling the amount of time they spend working with kindergartners. They are expected to provide media lessons that tie into the kindergarten curriculum topics and meet library media curriculum standards, on top of providing lessons for five other grades! What’s a busy librarian to do?

Enter *Kindergarten Magic: Theme-Based Lessons for Building Literacy and Library Skills*. This comprehensive resource provides a framework for kindergarten media lessons, emphasizing activities that are fun, interactive, age-appropriate, and based on standard kindergarten benchmarks. Chapter 1 introduces guiding principles for kindergarten lesson planning, and chapter 2 addresses the inclusion of special needs students and nonnative English speakers. The thematic units that follow offer media activities that connect with thirty-six of the most common kindergarten classroom topics, such as sea animals, dinosaurs, and seasons. Each thematic unit includes

- “Kindergarten Speak” (tips on introducing the content in meaningful language for this age group)
- 5 recommended books to read in class with annotations and suggestions for use
- 4 fingerplays/rhymes/movement activities/songs
- 2 flannelboard or prop stories, with patterns
- 1 writing readiness activity
- 1 math activity
- 1 takeaway activity (craft or worksheet)
- 1 library skill–building game
- 1 American Sign Language activity (accompanied by illustrations of the signs)
- 1 Spanish activity (accompanied by a pronunciation guide)
- “Recommend This!” (suggested age-appropriate books related to the theme that kindergartners may enjoy on their own)

Each activity is labeled with the specific skills it enhances, and an index of activities by skill appears at the end of the book, along with a comprehensive index. These skills listings are drawn from Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning’s *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks* (4th edition; available online at [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)), as well as from our own experience. Because various school districts use different guidelines, it would be impossible to provide skills benchmarks that match each reader’s needs, but we have endeavored to provide skill labels that will best allow each school librarian to align the lesson ideas here with his or her individual teaching needs.

Appendix A offers suggested resources for lesson planning. For further suggestions on developing flannelboards and other props, see appendix B. To make your life even easier, you can print full-sized versions of all the illustrations and flannelboards from the *Kindergarten Magic* Web Extra page: [www.alaeditions.org/webextras/](http://www.alaeditions.org/webextras/). This icon indicates web-only content: 

Let the kindergarten magic begin!

# Creating Memorable Library Moments for Kindergartners

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**FOR MOST** kindergartners, school is a brave new world, full of wondrous places—and one of the most wondrous is surely the school library. A new class of kindergartners entering your library is an opportunity for you to inspire a love of books and information in a whole new group of students. With the right approach, media lessons can be like magic for these children! This chapter will address principles of media instruction that is tailored to kindergartners, principles of early literacy, and techniques for effective classroom management in the school library.

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## Principles of Library Instruction for Kindergartners

Kindergartners can pose special challenges for school librarians. These students often don't know the rules of school yet or might not even know how to sit still or behave in a library. They may require more concentrated attention than other grades. School librarians who focus on multiple grade levels may have difficulty establishing age-appropriate expectations for kindergartners' behavior and level of understanding. The following principles will give you a framework for creating kindergarten media lessons that capture students' interest and enhance learning.

### **1. Use a variety of materials and stimuli.**

Young children learn about their world through their senses. Though kindergartners are beginning to develop a more mature awareness of the world than they had in preschool, they still need to use their senses to understand major concepts. By using a variety of props, games, books, and other materials in lessons, you will not only capture the attention of your students, you will also give them multiple avenues for understanding the topic. Using a variety of materials also gives students with different learning styles an opportunity to connect with the topic.

### **2. Make your school library welcoming to kindergartners.**

In creating effective media lessons, we need to adjust for the physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of kindergartners. Adults can be intimidating to young children, so doing something as simple

as sitting or bending down so that you can meet the child at eye level will do a lot to strengthen your relationship with your students. Make sure the chairs that kindergartners sit in are of an appropriate size; if necessary, have the children sit on the floor instead. If your library tables are too high, consider purchasing plastic trays for students to use as lap desks (Lakeshore Learning's paint and collage trays are ideal: [www.lakeshorelearning.com](http://www.lakeshorelearning.com)). Also, remember that children at this age do not have the same attention spans as fifth-graders, so don't expect sustained periods of sitting still or silence. Incorporate movement or interaction throughout your lesson to anticipate this behavior.

One of the most difficult tasks for many school librarians is to find child-friendly ways to explain difficult concepts. After all, most of us do not have the same training and experience that kindergarten teachers have. Strive to keep your explanations about library procedures as jargon-free as possible (for example, say "checkout desk" instead of "circulation desk"). If you do want to introduce library-specific terminology, make sure to explain what each term means. Throughout this book, we have included suggestions for introducing each topic in meaningful ways for kindergartners.

### **3. Use repetition, reinforcement, and smart planning.**

Highlight important information through repetition, preferably in fun, interactive ways. Use praise to reinforce desired behaviors. Find out what motivates your students and use it. Games with simple prizes, such as stickers, are often all that's needed to motivate children at this age.

When planning the order of your lesson, start out strong. A welcome song or ritual can get the group together and focused. Do the hardest material (i.e., that which requires the most sustained attention) at the beginning of the class. Save the most active parts of the class for last, as they tend to dispel the group's focus.

### **4. Work with classroom teachers to coordinate themes.**

Depending on the teacher, coordinating themes can be incredibly easy or incredibly difficult—or somewhere in between. Approach kindergarten teachers at the beginning of the school year and ask them for a list of the themes they plan to cover. Let them know that, to provide a more seamless experience for your students, you are planning to reflect the classroom themes in media lessons and that you would like to maintain an open dialogue with the teachers to avoid overlapping or introducing a theme too early. Check in with teachers periodically throughout the year. (And if you have a particularly uncommunicative teacher, we find that bribing him or her with chocolate is often effective!)

### **5. Make media lessons interactive.**

No one likes to be talked at, but kindergartners don't know how *not* to interact with something that interests them. Find ways to include every child in the lesson, whether by asking questions about a story as you read, playing a game in which everyone gets a turn to match a word, signing a rhyme, or choosing a song that everyone can sing together. Many children learn best through *doing*, so give them something to do that will reinforce the concepts you want them to learn. At this age, children are not yet "too cool" to participate, so harness that energy!

### **6. Use music whether you can sing or not.**

Many adults are uncomfortable singing, in a way children rarely are. But children don't judge your voice. So even if you feel like you can't carry a tune in a bucket, don't be afraid to use music with your kindergartners. Music can influence the mood of a class, capture wandering attention, convey directions, or just add joy. And, more important in our standards-focused time, using music effectively with young children can develop their oral fluency and get them excited about reading. When singing a song with your class, make sure the words are visible on the board or screen, and follow along with your finger as you sing. The music will help the children retain the words, and seeing the words will promote early literacy skills. Children learn new skills through practice, and using music is a way to make that practice and reinforcement fun and enjoyable.

Most of the themes in this book include suggestions for songs to use in conjunction with the lessons. We encourage you not to skip over the musical suggestions, whether you think you can sing or not. If you are uncomfortable singing, then select songs that have common tunes; you will have to sing them only once or twice before the children will sing for you. You can also take advantage of recorded music, but we find that this is rarely as effective as the live human voice.



**7. Learn about learning styles, and go beyond yours.**

Whether verbal or visual, kinesthetic or social, each person favors one or two learning styles above others. (To find out more about learning styles, check out [www.learning-styles-online.com](http://www.learning-styles-online.com).) Unfortunately, we educators tend to favor our own learning styles, leaving our students who have different preferences to fend for themselves. Use information about learning styles to make your lessons appealing to all your students. This is another reason to use a variety of media and stimuli in your lessons; visual learners will respond to pictures, aural learners will appreciate the music, verbal learners will learn best from your narration, kinesthetic learners will gain most from movement and sign language, and social learners will enjoy group activities. (For more information about using American Sign Language in stories, songs, and rhymes, see *Try Your Hand at This: Easy Ways to Incorporate Sign Language into Your Programs* by Kathy MacMillan, Scarecrow Press, 2005.)

**8. Support outcomes in other curriculum areas . . .**

The school library is often the hub of an elementary school, and so it should be; with information for and from every area, the school library supports them all. This concept can be applied to media lessons as well. By educating ourselves about the standards for areas such as math, science, and language arts at the various grade levels, we can incorporate skills that students need into media lessons. Writing activities, pattern matching, counting activities, and classification are all easy to implement in the school library and will provide students with reinforcement of curricular skills as well as a more integrated education.

**9. . . . but don't forget those library and media skills!**

Focusing on outcomes in reading, writing, and math is all well and good, but the primary focus of a school librarian should be on the development of library/media skills. This principle can be easy to forget at the kindergarten level, where the focus is so heavy on weekly themes and topics. The activities suggested in this book use common kindergarten classroom themes to introduce and practice important library/media concepts. Make sure to booktalk some titles pertaining to each week's theme so that children see how their library provides them with information on many areas.

**10. Encourage a love of reading and an appreciation of literature without constraints.**

In so many areas of their school lives, students are told what to read and when to read it. Let the school library be the place where students can choose what *they* are interested in. Reading incentive programs can be very effective, but those that require kids to read books in specific categories or to meet specific criteria undermine the joy of reading—particularly for reluctant readers, who need those programs the most! If a child wants to check out a book that is obviously beyond his or her reading level, don't snatch it away . . . but gently guide the child to *also* pick a book or two at the appropriate level. The kindergartner's experience of the school library can establish expectations and emotions toward reading that will last throughout elementary school, and perhaps a lifetime. Let children's experience of books and libraries be one of joy and discovery, not one of limits and wagging fingers.

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## Supporting Early Literacy in the School Library

Though school librarians do not teach reading and writing per se, we have many opportunities to incorporate reinforcement of these key curriculum areas in our lessons. In fact, studies show that children learn language best through interactive, functional activities that engage them (Neuman and Roskos 2005). These are just the kinds of activities we can provide in library lessons.

Kindergartners need to develop skills in three key literacy areas:

*Oral language:* This area includes listening comprehension as well as vocabulary development.

*Alphabetic code knowledge:* This area includes knowledge of the actual letters as well as the ability to discriminate among sounds in words (phonological/phonemic awareness).

*Print knowledge and concepts:* This area includes general facts about the function of print (for example, letters represent concepts, text is read from left to right, and a book must be held right side up when reading).

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## Principles of Early Literacy

### **1. Provide opportunities for students to hear lots of language.**

Through storytelling, songs, poetry, and fingerplays, kindergartners absorb language. The more language they hear, the more fluent their speech becomes. Surround your students with the spoken word. And remember, students need to be exposed to a wide variety of vocabulary so they can develop their own vocabularies (Strickland and Riley-Ayers 2006). Don't shy away from using classic poetry or stories with more advanced language, as long as the basic concepts and meaning are within a kindergartner's grasp.

### **2. Provide opportunities for students to express themselves orally.**

The best early literacy practitioners incorporate lots of interaction into their work with children. Don't just read a story aloud; stop at critical points and ask students to predict what will happen next, or ask their opinion about the story so far. Invite them to help tell or retell parts of the story using their own words. Wordless picture books also provide a wonderful way to elicit commentary from children. All these actions help children develop expressive language fluency, and the interaction with a fluent reader is a key part of the motivation for young children.

### **3. Provide opportunities for students to develop print awareness.**

Many educators attempt to instill print awareness in students by labeling anything that doesn't move, but in fact the quality of text (and interaction with that text) is more important than sheer quantity of words (Czarnecki, Stoltz, and Wilson 2008). Provide the printed word in ways that will be meaningful to students: highlight important library vocabulary, or provide the words to a poem or fingerplay on a whiteboard. Use words in games to motivate students to interact with the text.

### **4. Banish drills and emphasize language in context.**

In response to the growing achievement gap in public schools, many pre-K and kindergarten educators have resorted to flash cards and drills to teach reading skills. Not only is this technique developmentally inappropriate for this age group, but the limited view of reading it inspires may actually undermine students' future literacy development. Study after study shows that students need interactive, meaningful experiences through which they can connect language to other concepts (Neuman and Roskos 2005). Rather than focusing solely on letter sounds or on how to write a specific letter, think about the functionality of language—what will motivate your students to interact with language? Connect the vocabulary to kindergartners' interests by using it to show how things work and how they can use language to help them navigate the world.

### **5. Provide opportunities for students to develop print knowledge and concepts.**

In this area the school library has a special advantage, since many concepts about print (such as how to hold a book, where to find the title and author, reading from left to right) tie in nicely with media curriculum goals. Make the process of reading transparent to students by commenting aloud when you are reading and writing, so that children can begin to understand the logic of starting at the beginning of the book or holding the book right side up. Such moments need not be full-blown lessons but can be incorporated each time you open a book.

### **6. Use multiple methods and adapt for special needs.**

In the next chapter we will discuss specific adaptations for special needs, but if you are already using multiple methods in your lessons, this adaptation will be that much easier. To address different personalities and learning styles, use a variety of materials and stimuli in your lessons: books, big books,

charts, toys, props, puppets, music, games, crafts . . . the possibilities are endless. Anything that will capture students' attention, motivate them to interact with the concepts, or provide a fun emphasis of a topic is a candidate.

### **7. Utilize all the senses.**

Young children learn about the world through their senses, so allow them to use all their senses during lessons. Listening is important, but tactile experiences, such as touching magnetic letters, raised print, or beeswax letters, can also help students understand the shapes of letters. Help them develop large motor skills by drawing large letters in the air. Use sign language to help kinesthetic learners connect concepts to movement. Research shows that simply using the American Sign Language manual alphabet with young children can increase letter recall and comprehension. For more information about this phenomenon, see Marilyn Daniels's extraordinary book, *Dancing with Words: Signing for Hearing Children's Literacy* (Bergin and Garvey, 2001). Give students a variety of visual stimulation by using pictures, puppets, videos, scarves, and other props.

### **8. Don't overlook the mundane details that can affect students' experience of the school library.**

Theory and interactive concepts are all valuable, but if your well-planned lesson, carefully crafted with the principles of early literacy in mind, is presented in such a way that students can't hear, see, or interact with the materials appropriately, all your work will be for naught. Think about sightlines when determining the arrangement of your lesson space; many school libraries, for example, are set up with tables and chairs in rows, whereas a semicircle of chairs, or even a comfortable space where children can group on the floor, might be preferable. When presenting stories, be sure to move the book so that everyone can see the pictures. Tilt the top of the book down toward the listeners to minimize glare. Speak loudly enough so that students can hear. (Studies have shown that boys in particular may have difficulty hearing female teachers, especially from their preferred position in the back of the room, leading to many perhaps false diagnoses of ADHD; Sax 2005, 87–88). Think through the possible logistical issues of your lesson plan beforehand and come up with a clear order of events, and then communicate that order to your students. When using props for your lessons, make sure they are large enough for all the children to see. If playing a game or doing an activity for which the children will need to take turns, provide clear instructions and expectations for how the turn-taking will go: Will you call each child up? Will you go down the rows? Though these kinds of details may seem trivial, they can have a significant impact on students' ability to focus, learn, and retain information.

### **9. Don't confuse early literacy with lack of literacy.**

In recent years, there has been a push to shove phonics and writing skills down the throats of progressively younger children—most of whom are developmentally unready for direct reading instruction. Recognize the important concepts being conveyed via reading stories, allowing children to retell stories, and playing with language. Young children learn best through play, so don't assume that enjoyable, playful learning experiences are inferior to traditional classroom drills and instruction. In fact, children learn and retain concepts more readily when those concepts are conveyed through fun, functional activities—in other words, through play (Lu 2003).

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## **Creative Classroom Management in the School Library**

Classroom management involves more than punishment and discipline; in fact, teachers and librarians with good classroom management skills tend to be proactive, setting their students up for success and minimizing distractions that can encourage negative behavior.

**1. Be prepared.**

The best way to ensure a smooth class is to make sure you have all the pieces you need in place before the class arrives. Know your lesson plan and have everything you will need laid out. This point may seem simple and even obvious, but shoddy planning makes for scattershot lessons, which makes it difficult for students to focus. When you are leading activities, have a plan for how the children will take turns or come forward to get their supplies—and communicate that plan clearly to the students. When dismissing the children to look for books, send them in small groups rather than as a herd. A little bit of planning will make your media lessons calm and controlled.

**2. Set expectations.**

The number one way to prevent unwanted behaviors is to set your expectations from the beginning. The first time the kindergarten class visits the school library, go over the appropriate behaviors. You can even have the students themselves make suggestions for rules (and you may find their rules stricter than your own!). See chapter 3's lesson plan, "Welcome to the Library," for more specific ideas about expectations.

**3. Remind students of expectations.**

If you do have a specific recurring issue, give a friendly reminder about that issue at the beginning of class. By making a general announcement, you are not singling out any child in particular, and you are also giving students fair warning that the behavior will not be tolerated.

**4. Give specific and reasonable consequences.**

When making that general announcement, also remind students what the consequence for the behavior will be. Unless the behavior is egregious (such as hitting or endangering another child), give a warning to allow children to make a better choice before you dole out the consequence. For example, if a child runs in the school library, say something like, "Brian, we don't run in the school library. If I see you run again, you will not be able to check out any books today."

**5. Make consequences matter, and make them positive whenever possible.**

Many schools use one-size-fits-all consequences such as going to a time-out room, making a trip to the principal's office, or losing recess time. Although all these methods can be effective, you might find it more useful to make the consequence fit the child. What motivates one child to pay attention and behave may not motivate another. Use positive reinforcements to encourage the behavior you want to see. For example, while one child may be motivated by the chance to check out an extra book, another may be motivated by a chance to win a small prize, such as a sticker. Another may be motivated by a chance to have the school librarian sit with him or her at lunch.

**6. Keep children involved.**

Using interactive strategies throughout your lesson will keep kindergartners involved and therefore less likely to be disruptive. If a child is disrupting the group, find ways to bring that child into the group activity. For example, simply incorporating a child's name into a story can distract her from mischief ("Tara, do you know what that crocodile said? He said . . .").

**7. Make your lesson plan age-appropriate.**

Remember, even though this age group can sit through longer stories than preschoolers can, their attention spans are still shorter than yours. Don't expect them to sit for too long without wiggling. Be ready to adjust your lesson if necessary in response to their needs. Keep a simple fingerplay or song in the back of your mind for moments when everyone needs a quick wiggle to refocus.

**8. Use music as a focusing tool.**

Playing music as the group enters is a wonderful way to set the mood. You may have a particular welcome song that you like, or you might play music appropriate to your topic. A hello song with motions is also a wonderful way to begin media time and get everyone focused. Don't be afraid to use your voice without accompaniment, too; it is amazing how children of any age will quiet down and pay attention if someone starts singing or reciting a poem.

**9. Use puppets in classroom management.**

Kindergartners respond well to puppets and often will respond to requests from puppets that they might ignore from adults! Try using a puppet or stuffed animal consistently in your lessons; you can even give it a lovably grumpy personality and have it say things like, “No jumping in the library! No books for you!” (You can play “good cop” to the puppet’s “bad cop.”) Using puppets helps keep behavior reminders playful; keeping reminders playful cuts down on nagging and increases the likelihood that your directions will be followed.

**10. Use sign language for visual reminders.**

A great deal of research has been done about the benefits of using sign language with hearing children in the classroom. Aside from the cognitive benefits of language development, using sign language for classroom management can make for a calmer, quieter classroom. Sign language cues also offer visual and kinesthetic learners a more effective way to grasp concepts, and you may find that students enjoy doing the signs so much that they use them to police each other! When introducing some of the basic signs you want to use throughout the year, you may or may not choose to explain to children that what you are using is American Sign Language, or ASL. (It is a good idea to explain this at some point, so that children understand that ASL is another language with its own rules.) Begin by using the sign every time you say the English word; eventually you will only need to use the sign itself, which means no more nagging. Illustrations of some of the most useful classroom management signs follow.



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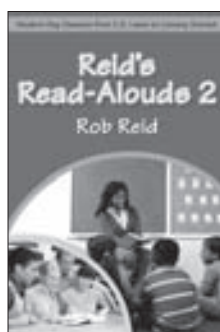
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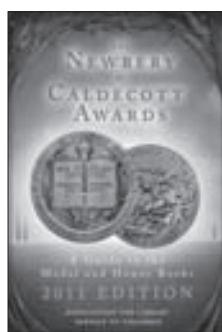
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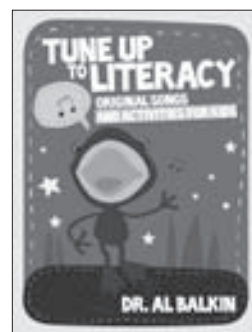
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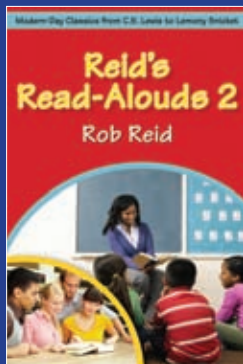
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