



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

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Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction xi

1 Creating Memorable Library Moments for Kindergartners 1

Principles of Library Instruction for Kindergartners 1

Supporting Early Literacy in the School Library 3

Principles of Early Literacy 4

Creative Classroom Management in the School Library 5

2 Meeting Special Needs in the School Library 9

Students with Disabilities 9

Nonnative English Speakers 11

3 Welcome to the Library 13

4 Welcome to Kindergarten 19

5 Nursery Rhymes 25

6 All about Me 33

7 Friends and Family 39

8 Safety 45

9 Fall 51

10 Apples and Pumpkins 57

11 Trees 63

12 Spiders 69

13 Nocturnal Animals 75

14 Thanksgiving 81

15 Nutrition and Food Groups 87

16 Holidays and Traditions 95

17	Gingerbread	101
18	The Five Senses	109
19	The New Year	117
20	Winter	123
21	Health	131
22	Martin Luther King Jr./Celebrating Diversity	139
23	The 100th Day of School	147
24	Transportation	153
25	Space	161
26	Community Helpers	169
27	Valentine's Day	177
28	Presidents' Day	183
29	Fairy Tales and Folktales	189
30	St. Patrick's Day	197
31	Dinosaurs	203
32	Weather	209
33	Spring	215
34	Zoo Animals	223
35	Farm Animals	231
36	Sea Animals	237
37	In the Garden	243
38	Summer	249

Appendix A: Further Resources for Lesson Planning 255

Appendix B: Making Flannelboards, Stick Puppets, and More 259

Index of Names and Titles 263

Index of Topics, Themes, and Skills 269

WEB Flannelboard patterns, craft patterns, and worksheets
are available online at 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), 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/. This icon indicates web-only content: 

Let the kindergarten magic begin!

Creating Memorable Library Moments for Kindergartners

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.

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). 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.) 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.

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).

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).

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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Index of Names and Titles

Titles of books are in italic. Titles of stories, songs, rhymes, and other activities are in roman.

A

Abigail's Surprise, 71
Alborough, Jez, 153
All the Colors of the Earth, 139
Alligator, Alligator, 224
Alphabet Animals, 79
Alphabet Soup, 88
Alphabet Web, 72
Alphabetizing Ourselves, 84
The Always Prayer Shawl, 96
Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock, 70
Andreae, Giles, 237
The Animals at the Zoo, 225
Animals of Nighttime, 77
Animals of the Night, 75
Animals of the Night, 76
Ant Picnic, 251
Ants at the Picnic, 249
Apple fractions, 54
Apples, Apples, Apples, 58
La Araña Muy Pequeña, 73
El Arbol, 67
Armour, Peter, 90
Arnold, Tedd, 33
Asch, Frank, 209
Aston, Dianna Hutts, 161
At My House, 42
At the Construction Site, 154
Axle Annie and the Speed Grump, 45
Ayes, Katherine, 243

B

Baby Bat's Lullaby, 76
The Baby BeeBee Bird, 224
Baker, Keith, 25
Banks, Merry, 75
Barnyard Banter, 232
Barron, Rex, 87
Bate, Bate, Chocolate, 99
Bateman, Teresa, 177
Bats Are Flying, 77
Bauer, Marion Dane, 209
Be a Tree, 64, 216

Beach Day, 250
The Beastly Feast, 88
Bee My Valentine, 177
Beeler, Selby, 131
Before It Gets Dark, 27
Benny's Pennies, 41
Berendes, Mary, 197
The Best Gift, 97
Bicycle Time, 158
Bizarre Dinosaurs, 204
The Black Book of Colors, 109
Blast Off!, 167
Blue Sea, 239
Boelts, Maribeth, 81
Book! Book! Book!, 15, 231
Book Parts Simon Says, 37
B-O-O-K-S, 22
A Book's Family, 42
Bornstein, Ruth Lercher, 215
Bowen, Anne, 169
Brett, Jan, 101
Brimmer, Larry Dane, 249
Brisson, Pat, 41
Brown, Margaret Wise, 55
Bruss, Deborah, 15, 231
Buchman, Rachel, 21
The Buddy System, 47
Buffet Ballet, 90
Buggy Day, 219
Building a Castle, 193
Bumpin' Up and Down in My Space Shuttle, 162
Bunting, Eve, 57, 81
The Busy Little Squirrel, 52
Butterfly, 217
Buzzeo, Toni, 14

C

Call Number Card Game, 143
Campbell, Rod, 223
Can You Guess Where We're Going?, 13
Can You Name the Animals?, 80
Carle, Eric, 69, 75, 228
Carlson, Nancy, 40, 147
Carr, Jan, 215
Carrot Soup, 244
Castle Capers, 191

Catch a Leprechaun, 199
Celebration Candle, 98
Character Coins, 200
Cherry Pies and Lullabies, 96
Chocolate Ice Cream Cone, 253
Chrysanthemum, 34
Church, Caroline Jayne, 63
Cinco Autocamión de Bomberos, 50
Cinco Elefantitos, 31
Cinco Little Gingerbread Men, 107
Cinco Mono Pequeños, 229
Cinco Verde Dragóns, 195
Cinco Verde Guisantes, 248
Cinco Verde Shamrocks, 202
The Class Beanstalk, 193
Classifying Books, 174
Climb Aboard, 163
Cohen, Miriam, 177
Color Guessing Game, 56
Commotion in the Ocean, 237
Community Helper Guessing, 174
Community Helper Matching Game, 172
Community Helpers Matching Game, 175
Cottin, Menena, 109
Countdown Clocks, 120
Countdown to the *Año Nuevo!*, 122
Counting Elephants, 31
Counting Pennies, 186
Counting Snowflakes, 127
Counting Vehicles, 157
Cracking the Secret Code—Fiction, 91
Crazy Food, 89
Create a Book, 165
Create a Fish, 240
Crews, Nina, 210
Cronin, Doreen, 69, 183, 232
Cumulative Tales, 181
Curtis, Jamie Lee, 33
Cuyler, Margery, 45

D

Dahl, Michael, 249
Davi, Katie, 20
De qué color?, 24
Dear Zoo, 223
Dear Zoo letter, 226

Deedy, Carmen Agra, 14
 dePaola, Tomie, 201
 Diakite, Penda, 131
Diary of a Spider, 69
 Did You Ever See a Snowflake?, 126
Diez Copos de Nieve, 129
Dig Dig Digging, 154
 Dino Skeleton, 206
 Dinosaur, Dinosaur, 207
 Dinosaur, Dinosaur, What Do You Eat?, 205
 Dinosaur Romp, 204
Dinosaurs, 203
 Diversity Wreath, 143
Do Cows Turn Colors in the Fall?, 52
 Do the Daddy Long Legs, 71
 Do You Know George Washington?, 185
 Do You Know the Gingerbread Man?, 103
Do Zebras Bloom in the Spring?, 216
 Down on Grandpa's Farm, 236
 Down on the Farm, 234
 Dragon, Dragon, 191
 Dream Quilt, 143
 Drive the Car, 155
Duck for President, 183
Duck in the Truck, 153

E

The Eensy Weensy Spider, 73
 Egg Carton Counting, 234
 Egielski, Richard, 102
 Ehlert, Lois, 51, 64, 243
 Election in the Library!, 185
Eliza's Kindergarten Surprise, 20
 Emberley, Rebecca, 93
Emergency!, 46
 Emergency!, 46
Emily's First 100 Days of School, 148
 Erickson, Gina Clegg, 214
 Ernst, Lisa Campbell, 102
Eyes, Nose, Fingers, and Toes, 34

F

Fairytales News, 190
Fall Is Not Easy, 64
 Fall Pictures, 54
 Falwell, Cathryn, 95
Families Are Different, 40
 Family Portrait Worksheet, 42
 Family Traditions, 98
 Farm Song, 233
 Farm Yard Fun, 233
 Favorite Food Graph, 91
 Favorite Presidents, 186
 Favorite Thanksgiving Food Graph, 84
 Favorite Things about School, 22
Feast for Ten, 95
 Feelings, 38
 Feelings, 35
 Fiction versus Nonfiction, 66
 Fire Truck Shapes, 48
 The Firefighter, 170

The Firefighters' Thanksgiving, 81
 Fireworks, Fireworks, 118
First Night, 118
 The First Thanksgiving, 83
 Fish Dance, 241
 Fishing for Call Numbers, 240
 Five Balloons, 97
 Five Clownfish, 238
 Five Dinosaurs, 204
 Five Dinosaurs, 206
 Five Fire Trucks, 48
 Five Fish, 239
 Five Gingerbread Men in the Bakery Shop, 105
 Five Gray Squirrels, 54
 Five Green Apples, 59
 Five Green Peas, 244
 Five Leprechauns, 199
 Five Little Bats, 77
 Five Little Dragons, 192
 Five Little Monkeys Swinging from a Tree, 64
 Five Little Snakes, 225
 Five Pots of Gold, 199
 The Five Senses, 115
 Five Senses Guessing Game, 111
 Five Silly Pigs, 233
 Five Snowflakes, 211
 Five Special Senses, 111
 Five Valentines, 179
 Fleming, Denise, 88, 123, 232
 Flower Power, 218
 Flower Rainbow, 220
 Flowers for My Family, 247
 Focus on Fiction, 55
 Food Groups Song, 89
 Food Guessing Game, 93
Forest Friends' Five Senses, 109
 Fraser, Mary Ann, 14
Freight Train, 154
 Friend, Catherine, 232
 Friendship Sign Song, 43

G

Gackenbach, Dick, 63
 Gainer, Cindy, 139
 Galaxy Bend and Stretch, 163
 Galdone, Paul, 189
 Garden Stretch, 244
 Garelli, Cristina, 109
 George, Lindsay Barrett, 124
Germs! Germs! Germs!, 132
 Giant Footprints Review Game, 194
 Gibbons, Gail, 64, 162, 178, 203
 Gill, Jim, 90
Gingerbread Baby, 101
The Gingerbread Boy, 102
 Gingerbread Cookie Matching Game, 106
The Gingerbread Cowboy, 102
The Gingerbread Girl, 102
The Gingerbread Man, 102
 Gingerbread Man File Folder Story, 104

Gingerbread Men Counting Game, 105
 Gingerbread Race, 106
 Gingerbread Rhyme, 102
 Gisler, Margaret, 93
 Giving Presents, 97
 Going on a Picnic, 91
 Going to School, 152
 Goldstone, Bruce, 88
 Gone Fishing, 239
Good Luck! A St. Patrick's Day Story, 198
 Grambling, Lois G., 169
 Green Grow the Clovers, 199
 Greene, Rhonda Bowler, 82
 Grow Your Own Beanstalk, 193
Grumpy Bird, 34
 Gustafson, Scott, 88

H

Had a Friend, 41
 Hall, Kirsten, 170
 Hall, Zoe, 57
 Hamanaka, Sheila, 139
 Hamilton, Emma Walton, 159, 182
 Handy Bat Puppets, 78
 Handy Tree Worksheet, 66
 Happy New Year, 121
 Happy New Year, 121
 Happy Teeth, 133
 Harper, Charise Mericle, 70, 164
 Harper, Jessica, 20
 Harris, Calvin, 61
 Haugen, Brenda, 147, 197
 Hawkins, Colin and Jacqui, 190
 Hayes, Karel, 124
 Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes, 136
 Heart Matching Game, 180
 Hearts and Flowers, 178
 Helicopter, 155
 Henkes, Kevin, 34
Henry's 100 Days of Kindergarten, 147
Hickory Dickory Dock, 25
 Hickory Dickory Dock, 28
 Hillenbrand, Jane, 39
 Hindley, Judy, 34
 Hoberman, Mary Ann, 25, 244
 Holiday Feast Counting Memory Game, 99
 Holiday Flag, 98
 Holub, Joan, 198
 Honest Abe, 184
 Hot, 250
 How Big Was T. Rex?, 206
How Big Were the Dinosaurs, 204
How Do Dinosaurs Get Well Soon?, 132
How Do Dinosaurs Go to School?, 204
 How Do I Feel?, 38
 How Does a Dinosaur Spell?, 206
 How Far Will Your Rocket "Fly"?, 164

How Many Letters?, 36
 How Much Is That Piggy?, 233
 How the Raccoon Got His Mask, 77
 Hubbell, Patricia, 216, 250
Hurray for Spring, 216

I

I Am a Bat, 76
 I Am a Grocer, 171
 I Am a Police Officer, 46
 I Am a T. Rex, 205
 "I Have a Dream," 141
 I Have Five Senses, 111
 I Have Two of These, 36
I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Pie, 82
I Know an Old Teacher, 169
 I like school, 20
 I Like to Play Safe, 47
I Lost My Tooth in Africa, 131
 I Love ..., 245
 I Love Sunshine, 210
I Love Trucks!, 154
I Took My Frog to the Library, 13
 I Went to School One Morning, 21
 I Went to the Dentist, 132
If Frogs Made Weather, 209
 If I were a kangaroo baby, 225
If the Dinosaurs Came Back, 203
If You Take a Mouse to School, 20
 If You're a Dinosaur, 205
 If You're a Spider, 71
 If You're Happy, 34
 If You're Hungry, 89
 I-LOVE-YOU Song, 181
 I'm a Giraffe, 224
 I'm a Little Seed, 245
 I'm a Little Snowman, 125
 I'm a Little Turkey, 83
 I'm Bringing Home a Little Gingerbread Man, 103
I'm Like You, You're Like Me, 139
 In My Neighborhood, 170
 In the Sky, 166
In the Snow: Who's Been Here?, 124
 In the Spring, 217
 Interview with a Book, 23
I.Q. Goes to the Library, 14
 Is It at School?, 23
It's Okay to Be Different, 140
 It's Presidents' Day, 187
It's Pumpkin Time!, 57
Itsy Bitsy the Smart Spider, 70

J

Jack and Jill Worksheet Craft, 29
 Jackson, Alison, 82
 James's Valentines, 182
Jamie O'Rourke and the Big Potato, 201
Jeremy Bean's St. Patrick's Day, 198
Jim Gill's Irrational Anthem and More Salutes to Nonsense, 90
 Joey's Beautiful Name, 35

K

Kalan, Robert, 239
 Kangaroo Baby, 225
Kate and the Beanstalk, 190
 Katz, Bobbi, 132
 Katz, Karen, 100
 Kelley, Marty, 64
 Kelly, Sheila, 145
 Kids Around the World Wake Up, 140
 Kimmel, Eric A., 13, 70, 102
Kindergarten Count to 100, 148
 The King Says/The Queen Says, 194
 Kirk, Daniel, 170
The Kiss That Missed, 190
 Krosoczka, Jarrett J., 184, 232

L

Late Last Night, 21
Leaf Man, 51
 Leaf Person Craft, 54
 Leaves Are Falling, 55
 Leprechaun, 198
 Leprechaun Stretch, 198
Let's Celebrate Presidents' Day, 184
 Library Charades, 49
The Library Doors, 14
The Library Dragon, 14
 Library Letters, 16
Library Mouse, 170
 Library Pokey, 17
 Library Skill-Building Game, 23
 Library Temps, 212
 Library Treasure Hunt, 29
 Library Vocabulary Bingo, 247
Light the Candle! Bang the Drum!, 95
 Light the Candles, 97
Like a Windy Day, 209
 Lincoln's Log Cabin, 187
 Lion Hide-and-Seek, 225
Little Apple Goat, 63
A Little Bit of Winter, 124
Little Blue Truck, 154
 Little Caterpillar, 220
Little Quack's New Friend, 41
The Little Red Hen, 189
The Little Scarecrow Boy, 55
 Little Squirrel, 52
 Living on Another World, 164
 The Lonely Tree, 65
Louanne Pig in the Perfect Family, 40
 Lucy's Picture, 142
 Lunch, 88

M

MacDonald, Amy, 70
 Making Gingerbread, 103
 Malyan, Sue, 237
 Markes, Julie, 82
 Martin, Bill, Jr., 224
Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 140
 Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 140
 Massie, Diane Redfield, 224
 Match the Fireworks, 120

Match the Shamrock Game, 200
 Match the Spider Webs, 72
 Matching Hearts Magnetboard, 180
 Matching Jack-o-Lantern Patterns, 61
 Matching Kites, 218
Max for President, 184
 Mayo, Margaret, 46, 154
 McGint, Alice B., 20
 McMillan, Bruce, 19
 McNamara, Margaret, 140
 Medearis, Angela, 140
 Melling, David, 190
 Metzger, Steve, 51
Mighty Tree, 63
 Miranda, Anne, 26
 Mirror Game, 114
Miss Bindergarten Celebrates the 100th Day of Kindergarten, 148
 Miss Muffet, Silly Style, 70
 Mitchard, Jacquelyn, 76
 Mollé, Tololwa M., 76
Monkey Soup, 134
Month, 118
The Moon Over Star, 161
 The More We Get Together, 41
 Morris, Ann, 95
 Most, Bernard, 203, 204
 Mouse Views: What the Class Pet Saw, 19
Mouse's First Spring, 217
Mouse's First Valentine, 178
 Mr. President, 185
Mrs. Muddle's Holidays, 96
 Murphy, Mary, 110
 My Castle, 191
 My Dump Truck, Fred, 156
 My First 100 Days, 148
My Food/Mi Comida, 93
 My Gingerbread House, 105
My Love for You All Year Round, 117
 My Map, 158
My Mom Is a Firefighter, 169
My New Town, 170
 My Phone Number Worksheet, 48
 My Pizza, 90
 My Teacher, 171
My Teacher for President, 184
 My Texture Book Craft, 113

N

Name Acrostic, 36
 Name Shapes, 37
 Name the Color, 24
 National Images, 186
 The New Year, 119
 New Year Relay Race, 120
 New Year Song, 119
 New Year's Eve, 118
 New Year's Resolutions, 120
 Nidey, Kelli, 52
 Nielsen, Laura F., 96
The Night Before St. Patrick's Day, 198
The Night Before Summer Vacation, 250
 Nighttime Animals, 78

Nine Little Apples, 59
 Not-So-Ordinary Ordinals, 151
Nueve Peregrinos Pequeños, 85
 Numeroff, Laura, 20

O

Oberman, Sheldon, 96
 O-C-E-A-N, 250
 Octopus, Octopus, 239
Officer Buckle and Gloria, 46
 Oh My Darling Valentine, 178
 Old MacDonald, 235
 On My Head, 34
 On This Holiday, 97
 One, Two Buckle My Shoe, 27
One Hot Summer Day, 210
 One Hundred Day Shimmy, 148
 One Hundred Days of School, 152
 One Hundred Days of School, 149
One Hundred Hungry Ants, 244
 100 Miles from Here, 150
 100 Things to Eat, 150
 100th Day Memories, 150
 100th Day Necklace, 151
The 100th Day of School, 147
 100th Day S'mores, 149
One Nighttime Sea, 238
One Summery Day, 249
1, 2, 3, to the Zoo!, 228
 Orbiting the Sun, 163
 Ordering Numbers, 114
 Osborne, Mary Pope, 190
 Our Body Guessing Game, 135
Over the Moon, 26
 The Owl, 79
 Owl Eggs, 78

P

Packing My School Bag, 21
Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?, 224
 Paper Bag Pumpkins, 61
 Paper Plate Portholes, 240
 Parr, Todd, 140
Parts, 33
Patty's Pumpkin Patch, 58
 Pea Pod Craft, 247
Peanut's Emergency, 46
 Peck, Jan, 238
 Pellegrini, Nina, 40
The Perfect Nest, 232
 Pez Poem, 241
 Picking a Pumpkin, 58
 Picking Fruits and Vegetables, 245
 Picking Pumpkins and Apples, 59
 Picture Perfect Food, 91
 Picture This!, 61
 Picturing Pie, 246
 Picturing Winter, 127
 Piernas-Davenport, Gail, 117
 Pierre, Stephanie St., 238
 Pinczes, Elinor J., 244
A Place Called Kindergarten, 20
 Planets (Time for Kids editors), 162
The Planets (Gibbons), 162

Planting a Rainbow, 243
Please Play Safe, 45
 Population Change, 144
 Poydar, Nancy, 210
 The President Says, 185
Presidents' Day, 184
 Presidents' Day Greetings, 188
A Promise to the Sun, 76
Pssst!, 223
 Pulver, Robin, 45
 Pumpkin, Pumpkin, 58
The Pumpkin Fair, 57
Pumpkin Harvest, 61
Pumpkins, 61
Punk Farm, 232

R

Rabbit's Good News, 215
 Rabe, Tish, 162
 Racing to the Rainbow, 65, 71
Rain, 110
 A Rainbow of Flores, 221
 Rathman, Peggy, 46
 Rau, Dana Meachen, 162
 Ready, Dee, 170
Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf, 64
 Reiser, Lynn, 96
The Relatives Came, 40
 Rex, Adam, 223
 Rhyming Words, 28
 Rickert, Janet Elizabeth, 58
 Robbins, Ken, 61
 Rocket Ships, 163
 Rockwell, Anne, 184
 Roddie, Shen, 39
 Rogers, Jacqueline, 148
 Roop, Connie and Peter, 184
 Roosa, Karen, 250
 Rooster's Feathers, 234
 Rose, Deborah Lee, 238
 Ross, Tony, 132
 Roth, Susan L., 117
 Rotner, Shelley, 110
 Rub-a-dub-dub, 28
 Rudy, Lisa Jo, 162
Russ and the Apple Tree Surprise, 58
 Rylant, Cynthia, 40

S

Sachar, Louis, 134
 SAFE Acrostic, 48
 Safety Signing Game : safety, 49
 Salat, Cristina, 46
 Same and Different, 144
 Sand Between My Toes, 251
 Sand on my Head, 251
 Sarah's Apples, 59
 Scarecrow, Scarecrow, 53
 Schertle, Alice, 154, 198
School Bus Drivers, 170
 School Fun, 22
 Scrugg, Joe, 21
Sea, Sand, Me!, 250
 Sea Animal Walk, 239
 Sea Animals, 240

Sea Creatures, 237
 Search Term Race, 235
 Searching Shimmy Shake, 227
 Seasons, 210
 Seasons Game, 211
The Seasons of Arnold's Apple Tree, 64
 See the Weather, 213
 Seeds, 246
 Segal, John, 244
 Senses, 113
Senses at the Seashore, 110
 Sequencing, 187
 Serfozo, Mary, 76
 Setting Toss, 207
 Seuling, Barbara, 216
 Shakin' Like a Leafy Tree, 65
 Shamrock Craft, 200
 Shamrock Song, 198
 Shannon, George, 181
Shante Keys and the New Year's Peas, 117
 Shell Match, 252
 Shields, Carol Diggory, 118
Showdown at the Food Pyramid, 87
 Sierra, Judy, 224
 Signs of Inequality, 143
 Simon, Norma, 210
Sing a Song of Seasons, 21
Singing for Dr. King, 140
 Slate, Joseph, 148
Sleep, Black Bear, Sleep, 124
 Sloan, Christopher, 204
 Sloat, Teri, 58
Snip, Snip . . . Snow!, 210
 Snow, Snow, Snow, 125
 Snowman, 124
 So Many Snowflakes, 126
 A Song of Fall, 52
 Sorting Simon Says, 157
 Sorting the Mail Game, 173
 Sorting Veggies, 246
Space Leftovers, 162
 Spanish-English Soundalikes, 159
 The Spider Went over the Mountain, 71
The Spider Who Created the World, 70
 Spider's ABC Web Worksheet, 72
 Splash! Crash! Flash!, 211
Splish, Splash, Spring, 215
 Spring Acrostic, 218
 Spring Dance, 217
Spring Song, 216
 Squires, Janet, 102
St. Patrick's Day, 197
St. Patrick's Day Shamrocks, 197
 Staying Healthy Song, 136
 Stemple, Heidi E. Y., 124
 Stewart, Paul, 124
 Stojic, Manya, 110
Stop That Pickle!, 90
 Stop That Pickle!, 90
 Story Elements Review Game, 219
 Story Elements--Problems and Solutions, 213

Sturges, Philemon, 154
 Summer Reading Time/Librarian Says,
 253
 Sun Catcher, 253
 Super Shapes, 22
 Suzy's Friends, 40

T

Taback, Simms, 26
 Tafuri, Nancy, 52
 Tankard, Jeremy, 34
 Teeth, 133
 Telescope, 165
 Ten Little Spiders, 70
 Thankful Collage, 84
Thanks for Thanksgiving, 82
 Thanksgiving, Thanksgiving, 82
 Thanksgiving Acrostic, 84
 Thanksgiving Day, 83
 That's a Fiction Book, 55
*There Was a Bold Lady Who Wanted a
 Star*, 164
There's No Place Like Space, 162
 This Is My Family, 40
This Is the Bird, 181
This Is the House That Jack Built, 26
 This Is the Way, 233
This Next New Year, 118
 Thompson, Lauren, 41, 178, 217
 Three Billy Goats Gruff, 192
The Three Pigs, 190
Throw Your Tooth on the Roof, 131
Thump, Quack, Moo, 232
 Time For Kids Editors, 162
Time to Sleep, 123
To Market To Market, 26
 To Win a Prince, 191
*Today I Feel Silly and Other Moods
 That Make My Day*, 33
 Toe Leg Knee, 35
Too Close Friends, 39
 Tooth Envelopes, 135
 Toothbrush Call Numbers, 135
 Touchy-Feel Bag, 112
 Traditions, 96
 Transportation Imagination, 157
 The Trash, 171
 The Tree, 67
A Tree for Me, 65

Tree Lore, 66
 Tree Shapes, 66
 Trees, Trees, Trees, 64
 Tricks to Keep You Well, 133
 The Turkey, 82
A Turkey for Thanksgiving, 81
 The Turkey Pokey, 83
 Two Little Blackbirds, 30

U

Unique Name Snowflakes, 127
Up, Down and Around, 243

V

Vail, Rachel, 26
 Valentine Colors, 182
The Valentine Express, 178
 Valentine Postcard, 180
 Valentine Tic-Tac-Toe, 180
Valentine's Day, 178
 Valentine's Day, 179
 Van Laan, Nancy, 65
 Vehicle Guessing Game, 155
The Very Busy Spider, 69
The Very First Thanksgiving Day,
 82
The Very Lonely Firefly, 75

W

Wallace, Nancy Elizabeth, 58, 178
Wash Your Hands!, 132
 Wash Your Hands, 133
 Washing Hands Poster, 135
Way Down Deep in the Deep Blue Sea,
 238
 Way Up High, 62
 Way Up High, 62
 We Are All Different, 141
 We are Thankful, 85
 We Can Count, 149
 Weather Song, 211
 Weather Wheel, 212
 Weather Words, 214
 Weather Words, 212
 Web words, 72
 Welcome to the library, 18
 Welcome to the library, 18
 Wells, Rosemary, 89, 148
 We're All Wearing Green, 201

We're Going on a Leaf Hunt, 51
 We're Going on Vacation, 252
Wet World, 210
 What a Pig!, 234
What a Treasure!, 39
 What Do I Need for My New Year's Eve
 Party?, 119
 What Hat Should I Wear?, 173
 What is Nonfiction?, 61
 What Is the Weather?, 214
 What Sound Does It Make?, 112
What the Sea Saw, 238
 What Type of Transportation Do I
 Need?, 156
When Autumn Falls, 52
 Where Is My Pumpkin?, 53
 Where Is Squirrel?, 53
 Who Keeps Us Safe?, 47
 Who Would Use This?, 42
Whooo's There?, 76
Whose Garden Is It?, 244
 Wiesner, David, 190
 Wiggle in My Toe, 21
 The Wiggles, 65, 71
Wild about Books, 224
Will You Be My Valenswine?, 177
 Wing, Natasha, 198, 250
 Winter Signs for Wintertime, 128
 Winter Transportation Guessing Game,
 125
The Winter Visitors, 124
 Winters, Kay, 184
 Wong, Janet S., 118
 Won't You Be My Valentine?, 179
 Woodruff, Elvira, 13
 Woodworth, Viki, 52, 216
 The World Is Like a Rainbow, 141

Y

Yoko, 89
 Yolen, Jane, 124, 132, 204
You Read to Me, I'll Read to You, 25
*You Smell and Taste and Feel and See
 and Hear*, 110

Z

Zebra Habitat, 226
 Ziefert, Harriet, 118, 154
 Zoo Graph, 226

Index of Topics, Themes, and Skills

A

adjectives, using: books, 223
all about me (theme), 33–38
alphabet: books, 20, 34, 58, 88, 154,
216; library skills, 72, 79, 84;
math, 200; takeaway, 72; writing
readiness, 206. *See also* alpha-
betical order; sounds with letters,
associating
alphabetic code knowledge in early
literacy, 3
alphabetical order: books, 58, 88, 170;
library skills, 66, 72, 79, 84, 91,
174; takeaway, 72
American Sign Language: actions, 194;
animals, 30, 73, 79, 207, 220,
228, 235, 241; books, 18; in
classroom management, 7; colors,
158; deaf, 114; feelings, 38; foods,
62, 92, 107, 253; health, 136;
holidays, 85, 99, 121, 187, 201; I
love you, 181; nature, 67, 166, 213;
and nonnative English speakers,
11; numbers, 228, 247; people, 43,
174, 247; safety signing game, 49;
same/different, 144; school, 23,
152; seasons, 55, 128; and sensory
awareness, 5
animal characteristics: books, 39, 223;
flannelboard/prop, 15
animals (theme), nocturnal, 75–80; sea,
237–241; zoo, 223–229
animals and their sounds: ASL, 235;
books, 231, 232; fingerplay/song,
225, 233; Spanish, 236; writing
readiness, 234
apples and pumpkins (theme), 57–62
assessing understanding, 10
attention and response: ASL, 49, 114,
158, 194, 228, 241; fingerplay/
song, 14, 40, 111, 125, 155, 185,
251; flannelboard/prop, 22, 36,
180, 205, 218, 225, 234; library
skills, 37, 49, 99, 143, 157, 181,
194, 219, 247; math, 135, 173;
Spanish, 24, 44, 93, 159, 202,
208, 221

attention of students, getting, 10
attention spans of kindergartners, 6
autism, students with, 10

B

behavior problems, management of, 6
biological evolution and the diversity of
life: ASL, 228; books, 203, 204,
223, 224, 232, 237, 238; finger-
play/song, 204, 225; flannel-
board/prop, 205, 239, 245, 246;
math, 206, 246; Spanish, 241;
takeaway, 226; writing readiness,
234, 240
body parts. *See* parts of the body; per-
sonal health
book care: game, 23; math, 17. *See also*
print carries messages, recognizing that
books are made, understanding how:
books, 170; library skills, 165. *See
also* parts of a book
books for checkout, evaluating: library
skills, 91
bubble guns, use of, 261

C

calendar time: books, 147, 161; library
skills, 120. *See also* time, telling
cause-and-effect relationships: books,
216
Chinese vocabulary: fingerplay/song,
140
classification and sorting skills: ASL,
23; books, 46, 63, 109, 110, 118,
124, 203, 243; fingerplay/song,
111; flannelboard/prop, 21, 112,
119, 141, 180, 205, 212, 246, 252;
library skills, 66, 127, 157, 200;
math, 61, 120, 200, 246; Spanish,
115; writing readiness, 66, 113
classroom management, 5–7
colors: ASL, 158; books, 88; flannel-
board/prop, 103, 234; library
skills, 42; math, 105; Spanish, 24,
56, 182, 202, 221
community helpers (theme), 169–175

community helpers, knowing about:
ASL, 174; books, 81, 169, 170,
184; fingerplay/song, 170, 171,
185; flannelboard/prop, 47, 171,
172; library skills, 181; math, 173;
Spanish, 175; takeaway, 173; writ-
ing readiness, 172
comparing and contrasting, 158; books,
82, 95, 96, 102, 117, 118, 131, 132,
184, 204, 238; fingerplay/song,
133, 155; flannelboard/prop, 97,
133, 185; math, 164; Spanish, 99;
takeaway, 106
comprehension strategies: books, 190;
flannelboard/prop, 28
comprehension through dramatic play:
books, 39, 69, 70, 75, 102; take-
away, 28
consequences for misbehavior, 6
costumes, use of, 261
counting, 247; ASL, 228; books, 33, 34,
40, 52, 95, 118, 147, 148, 210, 238,
244, 249; fingerplay/song, 21,
27, 59, 64, 70, 118, 133, 198, 204,
238; flannelboard/prop, 27, 41,
48, 54, 59, 77, 83, 97, 105, 126,
149, 163, 179, 192, 199, 206, 211,
225, 233, 239, 251; library skills,
99, 106, 114, 194, 219; math, 36,
78, 84, 91, 105, 127, 143, 157, 180,
186, 218, 226, 234, 252; Spanish,
31, 50, 85, 107, 167, 202, 208,
229, 248; takeaway, 120, 151;
writing readiness, 16, 150
creativity, developing: books, 45, 124,
132, 154, 162, 184, 190, 197, 198,
203, 210, 215, 223, 224, 232, 243,
250; library skills, 165; math,
48, 66, 98, 193, 240; takeaway,
22, 37, 42, 54, 61, 66, 78, 84, 91,
127, 135, 165, 200, 206, 212, 219,
226, 234, 240, 247, 253; writing
readiness, 54, 61, 78, 91, 98, 105,
157, 164, 180, 186, 193, 199, 212,
246, 252
critical thinking skills: flannelboard/
prop, 185

cultural differences, awareness of, 11
curriculum support, 3

D

days of the week: books, 39; flannelboard/prop, 245. *See also* calendar time
deaf and hard-of-hearing students, 9
democratic values: books, 140, 184; fingerplay/song, 140, 184, 185; flannelboard/prop, 185
Dewey Decimal classification: library skills, 127, 135
die-cutting machines, use of, 260
dinosaurs (theme), 203–208
directions, following: library skills, 151, 157
diversity of life. *See* biological evolution and the diversity of life
diversity, appreciating: ASL, 114, 144; books, 58, 89, 96, 117, 118, 131, 139, 140, 178; fingerplay/song, 140, 141; flannelboard/prop, 97, 141, 142; math, 98, 143; Spanish, 144; takeaway, 127, 143; writing readiness, 143. *See also* multiple perspectives, understanding; other cultures
dramatic play. *See* comprehension through dramatic play

E

early literacy, principles of, 3–5
elements of a story: books, 224, 231, 232, 238, 249; library skills, 200, 207, 213, 219
emotions, recognizing: ASL, 38; books, 20, 33, 34, 40, 46, 64, 75; fingerplay/song, 27, 34, 35; flannelboard/prop, 65; Spanish, 38
estimation skills: library skills, 194
evaluating books for checkout. *See* books for checkout, evaluating expectations and classroom management, 6

F

fairytale and folktales (theme), 189–195
fall (theme), 51–56
familiar phrases, reading: library skills, 151
families, vocabulary relating to: books, 40; fingerplay/song, 40; flannelboard/prop, 41; math, 42
farm animals (theme), 231–236
felt pieces, construction of, 259
fiction, concept of: library skills, 55, 61, 66, 91, 157, 174, 240. *See also* nonfiction, concept of
fine motor skills: books, 124, 177, 178, 197, 210; library skills, 120; math, 17, 28, 98; takeaway, 28, 84, 98, 120, 127, 135, 151, 165, 173, 180, 187, 200, 219, 226,

234, 240, 247, 253. *See also* motor skills

five senses (theme), 109–115
flannelboards, construction of, 259
food groups: books, 87; fingerplay/song, 89
food themes: apples and pumpkins, 57–62; gingerbread, 101–107; nutrition and food groups, 87–93
foods and nutrition: books, 88
fractions: math, 54
French vocabulary: fingerplay/song, 140
friends and family (theme), 39–44
furniture in library, 2, 5

G

garden (theme), 243–248
gingerbread (theme), 101–107
goal setting: books, 101; writing readiness, 135
graphs: books, 33, 40, 89, 95, 170; math, 84, 91, 157, 212, 226. *See also* maps
growth of living things. *See* living things, growth of

H

headbands, use of, 261
health (theme), 131–137
historical monuments: books, 184; flannelboard/prop, 186; math, 186
holidays and traditions (theme), 95–100; Martin Luther King Jr., 139–145; New Year, 117–122; Presidents' Day, 183–188; St. Patrick's Day, 197–202; Thanksgiving, 81–86; Valentine's Day, 177–182
holidays: books, 178, 197; fingerplay/song, 178, 179; flannelboard/prop, 179
human body themes: all about me, 33–38; five senses, 109–115; health, 131–137

I

incentives, use of, 6
information tools, use of: books, 250
information, organization of: books, 117, 139, 184, 197, 209, 210, 232; library skills, 227; math, 212
information, reading for: books, 57, 75, 87, 95, 131, 132, 161, 162, 170, 178, 184, 197, 203, 204, 216, 237, 238, 243, 244; library skills, 61. *See also* nonfiction, concept of
informational search strategies: library skills, 227, 235
interactive lessons, 2, 6
jargon, avoidance of, 2

Kindergarten, welcome to (theme), 19–24
Kindergartners: principles of instruction for, 1–3

L

laminating machines, use of, 260
language in context, 4
lap theaters, construction of, 260
learning styles, use of, 3; and special needs students, 10
librarian, role of: flannelboard/prop, 16
library and media skills, importance of, 3
library as welcoming place, 1–2
library, parts of: books, 14; flannelboard/prop, 17; library skills, 29, 240, 247
library, rules and routines of: books, 13, 14; flannelboard/prop, 16; game, 17; library skills, 49; song, 15; takeaway, 17
library, welcome to (theme), 13–18
listening skills: ASL, 174, 241; books, 118, 154, 198, 210; fingerplay/song, 185, 251; flannelboard/prop, 59, 71, 90, 156, 164, 192, 217, 225, 239; library skills, 219, 247; Spanish, 159, 175. *See also* vocabulary, developing
literary experience, reading for: books, 13, 14, 20, 25, 26, 33, 34, 39, 40, 45, 46, 51, 52, 57, 58, 63, 64, 69, 70, 75, 76, 81, 82, 88, 89, 95, 96, 101, 102, 109, 110, 117, 118, 123, 124, 131, 132, 139, 140, 147, 148, 153, 154, 169, 170, 177, 178, 183, 184, 189, 190, 198, 203, 209, 210, 215, 216, 223, 224, 231, 232, 237, 238, 243, 244, 249, 250; flannelboard/prop, 41; library skills, 55, 200
literary genres, understanding: books, 69, 70, 76, 82, 102, 169, 189, 190; flannelboard/prop, 77, 103, 192; library skills, 181
literature appreciation, encouraging, 3
living things, growth of: ASL, 220; books, 243, 244; fingerplay/song, 217, 244, 245; takeaway, 193
logic skills: books, 63, 101, 154, 216, 223; fingerplay/song, 111, 125, 155; flannelboard/prop, 41, 47, 112, 119, 142, 156, 205, 252; library skills, 227; math, 42, 173; Spanish, 152, 159; takeaway, 180; writing readiness, 164

M

magnetboards, construction, 259
maps: books, 204, 232; math, 150; takeaway, 158. *See also* graphs
Martin Luther King Jr./celebrating diversity (theme), 139–145

measurement: books, 177, 184, 204, 238; math, 206, 212. *See also* quantity, comparison of
 memory, developing: flannelboard/prop, 35, 90; library skills, 99, 181; Spanish, 202
 mobility-impaired users: location of, 9; and movement activities, 10
 Modesitt, Jeanne, 100, 182
 motivation and incentives, 2
 motor skills: ASL, 114, 158, 194, 207; books, 209; fingerplay/song, 21, 34, 35, 40, 41, 46, 52, 53, 58, 59, 64, 65, 71, 76, 82, 89, 90, 96, 102, 103, 118, 124, 125, 132, 133, 148, 154, 155, 163, 170, 171, 184, 185, 191, 198, 199, 204, 205, 211, 216, 217, 224, 225, 233, 238, 239, 244, 245, 251; flannelboard/prop, 71, 126, 172, 192; library skills, 55, 157, 207, 227, 240; Spanish, 99, 248; takeaway, 78. *See also* fine motor skills
 movement, incorporation of, 2
 multiple perspectives, understanding: books, 19. *See also* diversity, appreciating; other cultures, understanding
 music and singing, use of, 2, 6
N
 name, writing one's: books, 170; takeaway, 37, 127, 135; writing readiness, 36, 180, 193, 226
 nature, appreciating: ASL, 62, 67; books, 51, 52, 57, 58, 63, 64, 75, 109, 110, 123, 124, 209, 216, 243, 244; fingerplay/song, 52, 53, 59, 64, 217; flannelboard/prop, 59, 65, 77, 217; Spanish, 229; takeaway, 54, 193, 226; writing readiness, 54, 66, 212
 New Year (theme), 117–122
 nonfiction, concept of: books, 95; library skills, 61, 66, 157, 174, 240. *See also* fiction, concept of; information, reading for
 nonnative English speakers, 11
 numbers, recognizing: math, 28, 180, 200, 218. *See also* ordinal numbers
 numbers, writing: takeaway, 48
 numerical order: library skills, 99, 106, 114, 120, 135, 143, 174
 nursery rhymes (theme), 25–31
 nutrition and food groups (theme), 87–93
O
 100th Day of School (theme), 147–152
 oneself, describing: writing readiness, 36
 oral expression, developing, 4
 oral fluency, developing: ASL, 43, 55,

67, 73, 79, 85, 92, 99, 107, 121, 128, 136, 152, 166, 181, 187, 207, 213, 220, 235, 247, 253; books, 25, 39, 82, 89, 124, 153, 161, 177, 178, 197, 198, 203, 204, 210, 216, 238, 249, 250; fingerplay/song, 20–21, 26, 27, 34, 40, 47, 52, 53, 58, 59, 64, 70, 71, 77, 82, 89, 90, 96, 97, 102, 103, 111, 118, 119, 124, 125, 132, 133, 140, 141, 148, 149, 154, 155, 162, 163, 170, 171, 178, 179, 184, 185, 191, 198, 199, 204, 205, 210, 211, 216, 217, 224, 225, 233, 238, 239, 244, 245, 250, 251; flannelboard/prop, 27, 47, 48, 53, 54, 59, 65, 71, 77, 83, 90, 105, 112, 119, 126, 133, 156, 171, 179, 180, 186, 192, 199, 206, 211, 225, 233, 234, 239, 245, 251; library skills, 17, 55, 99, 181, 194, 200, 207, 213, 235; math, 135, 157, 200; Spanish, 24, 31, 62, 73, 80, 85, 93, 99, 115, 159, 202, 214, 221, 229, 248, 254; takeaway, 28; writing readiness, 72, 164, 218
 oral language in early literacy, order of lesson, 2
 ordinal numbers: library skills, 151, 187
 other cultures, understanding: books, 89, 117, 118, 131, 178; Spanish, 18, 121, 175, 182, 188, 202, 208, 229, 236. *See also* diversity, appreciating; multiple perspectives, understanding
P
 parts of a book: library skills, 37, 42, 127
 parts of the body: books, 33, 34; fingerplay/song, 21, 34, 35, 132; flannelboard/prop, 36; Spanish, 137
 patterns, understanding: books, 124; flannelboard/prop, 218; math, 61, 72, 113, 120, 200, 246; takeaway, 106
 people themes: community helpers, 169–175; friends and family, 39–44
 personal health: ASL, 136; books, 132; fingerplay/song, 132, 133; flannelboard/prop, 133; writing readiness, 135. *See also* parts of the body
 planning, benefits of, 6
 plant themes: garden, 243–248; trees, 63–68
 play, benefits of, 5
 prediction skills: books, 52, 70, 81, 131; flannelboard/prop, 71, 185; library skills, 61, 91; math, 113; takeaway, 180
 Presidents' Day (theme), 183–188
 print awareness, 4

print carries messages, recognizing that: books, 13, 25, 26. *See also* book care
 problem-solving skills: books, 70; library skills, 213
 props, placement of, 10
 puppets in classroom management, 7
 puppets, glove, construction of, 260
 puppets, stick, construction, 259–260

Q

quantity, comparison of: books, 204, 210; math, 36, 105, 135, 143, 157, 226. *See also* measurement; size and volume

R

read-along technique, 260
 reading drills, avoidance of, 4
 reading familiar phrases. *See* familiar phrases, reading
 reading incentive programs, 3
 repetition, use of, 2
 rhyme, recognizing: ASL, 30, 43, 55, 79, 128, 207, 247, 253; books, 25, 26, 34, 46, 64, 70, 76, 82, 88, 118, 124, 153, 162, 169, 177, 198, 237, 244, 250; fingerplay/song, 14, 15, 20–21, 27, 34, 35, 41, 46, 47, 52, 53, 58, 59, 64, 70, 76, 77, 82, 96, 97, 102, 103, 111, 118, 119, 124, 132, 133, 141, 148, 154, 155, 162, 163, 170, 171, 178, 179, 184, 185, 191, 198, 199, 210, 211, 216, 217, 224, 225, 233, 238, 239, 244, 245, 250, 251; flannelboard/prop, 22, 27, 28, 48, 53, 54, 59, 65, 77, 83, 97, 105, 112, 126, 150, 163, 164, 171, 179, 180, 192, 199, 211, 225, 233, 239, 245, 246, 251; library skills, 17, 29, 181; Spanish, 24, 50, 107, 182, 248, 254; takeaway, 17, 28; writing readiness, 17, 28
 rhythm sticks, use of, 261
 rhythm, developing: fingerplay/song, 47

S

safe behaviors, 49; books, 45, 46; fingerplay/song, 46; takeaway, 48; writing readiness, 48
 safety (theme), 45–50
 scarves, use of, 261
 school and library themes: Kindergarten, welcome to, 19–24; library, welcome to, 13–18; 100th Day of School, 147–152
 science and technology: books, 161, 162; fingerplay/song, 163; math, 164; Spanish, 167; writing readiness, 164. *See also* technology
 science themes: space, 161–167; weather, 209–214
 seasonal themes: fall, 51–56; spring,

215–221; summer, 249–254; winter, 123–129

senses, uses of: books, 109, 110; fingerplay/song, 111; flannelboard/prop, 112; library skills, 114; Spanish, 115; takeaway, 113; writing readiness, 113. *See also* parts of the body

sensory awareness, 5. *See also* learning styles, use of

sequencing skills: books, 26, 34, 39, 52, 57, 58, 64, 69, 70, 75, 102, 123, 132, 153, 161, 183, 190, 198, 215, 224, 231, 232, 238; fingerplay/song, 103, 171; flannelboard/prop, 15, 27, 28, 35, 41, 90, 103, 134, 192; library skills, 106, 165, 187

shakers, use of, 261

shapes: flannelboard/prop, 126; math, 22, 48, 66, 98, 193, 240

singing, use of, 2

size and volume, 73; fingerplay/song, 15, 58, 118; flannelboard/prop, 192, 239; math, 206. *See also* measurement; quantity, comparison of

sounds with letters, associating, 181; books, 20, 34, 154, 210, 216; writing readiness, 206. *See also* text and pictures, differentiating

space (theme), 161–167

Spanish vocabulary: animals, 31, 73, 80, 208, 236, 241; body parts, 137; colors, 24, 56, 182, 202, 221; emotions, 38; foods, 62, 93, 99; greetings, 140, 188; hot, 254; library terms, 18; nature, 67, 129, 214; numbers, 31, 85, 107, 121, 167, 202, 229, 248; people, 44, 175; safety, 50; school, 152; senses, 115; sound-alikes, 159

special needs users, adaptations for, 4–5, 9–11. *See also* learning styles, use of

spelling knowledge: books, 223, 237; fingerplay/song, 47, 250; flannelboard/prop, 22; library skills, 235; writing readiness, 22, 48, 212

spiders (theme), 69–74

spring (theme), 215–221

St. Patrick's Day (theme), 197–202

stories, elements of. *See* elements of a story

story themes: fairy tales and folktales, 189–195; nursery rhymes, 25–31

streamers, use of, 261

summer (theme), 249–254

sun and moon, patterns of the: ASL, 166; books, 118; fingerplay/song, 163

T

teachers, collaboration with, 2; and special needs users, 9

teamwork skills: ASL, 114; books, 52, 95, 189, 190; library skills, 61, 120, 143, 194, 206, 213, 219, 235; math, 186, 218, 246

technology: library skills, 227. *See also* science and technology

text and pictures, differentiating: books, 13, 46, 51, 124, 249; Spanish, 93

text-to-size self connection: books, 20, 33, 34, 40, 45, 46, 57, 58, 63, 81, 82, 87, 88, 89, 95, 96, 102, 109, 110, 131, 132, 139, 140, 147, 148, 154, 162, 170, 177, 178, 184, 189, 190, 203, 204, 209, 210, 215, 216, 224, 232, 238, 244, 250; fingerplay/song, 27, 89; flannelboard/prop, 21, 134, 150; game, 29; library skills, 187; takeaway, 22, 91, 135, 158, 212; writing readiness, 22, 42, 54, 61, 84, 91, 98, 119, 127, 143, 172, 186, 193, 226, 234, 240, 246, 252

Thanksgiving (theme), 81–86

themes, choice of, 2

time, telling: books, 25; math, 28; takeaway, 120. *See also* calendar time; days of the week

transportation (theme), 153–159

transportation: books, 154; fingerplay/song, 154, 155; flannelboard/prop, 156; math, 157; takeaway, 158; writing readiness, 157

trees (theme), 63–68

turn-taking and special needs students, 10

U

unit and its subdivision into equal parts, concept of: takeaway, 180

V

Valentine's Day (theme), 177–182

variety of materials, use of, 1

visual aids and ENL students, 11

visual discrimination: ASL, 114, 158, 194, 241; books, 19, 250; flannelboard/prop, 36, 53, 71, 180, 218, 225; library skills, 42; math, 61, 180, 246, 252

vocabulary, developing, 4

vocabulary, developing: books, 81, 82, 87, 117, 118, 139, 154, 210, 223, 224, 232, 237; fingerplay/song, 89, 204; flannelboard/prop, 90; library skills, 235, 247; writing readiness, 28, 36, 48, 72, 84, 113, 119, 218. *See also* families, vocabulary relating to; weather vocabulary

W

water, properties of: books, 237

weather (theme), 209–214

weather conditions: books, 209, 210, 215, 216, 249; fingerplay/song, 211, 217; flannelboard/prop, 212, 217; math, 212; takeaway, 212; writing readiness, 212

weather vocabulary, 213; books, 209, 210; fingerplay/song, 211; flannelboard/prop, 211, 212; library skills, 213; Spanish, 214; takeaway, 212; writing readiness, 212

welcome song, use of, 6

winter (theme), 123–129

writing one's name. *See* name, writing one's

writing, practicing: books, 45, 52, 57, 58, 63, 69, 81, 82, 96, 101, 132, 139, 140, 147, 148, 154, 162, 169, 170, 177, 178, 184, 189, 224, 232, 250; library skills, 165, 174; takeaway, 22, 66, 212; writing readiness, 28, 42, 54, 61, 66, 72, 78, 84, 91, 98, 105, 113, 127, 135, 143, 150, 157, 164, 172, 180, 186, 193, 199, 206, 212, 218, 226, 234, 240, 246, 252

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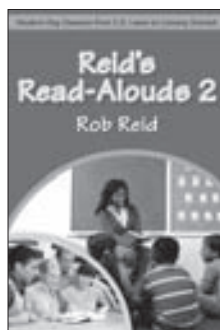
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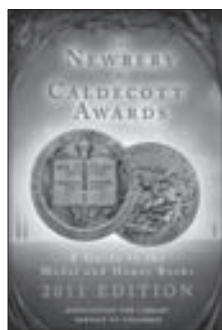
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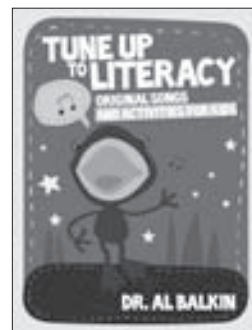
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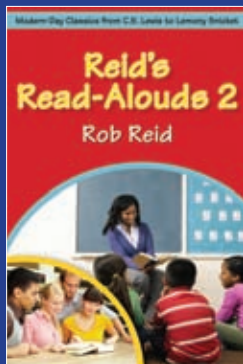
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