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Literacy Experiences at Home

Literacy Backpacks

As mentioned in the section on the Roots of Literacy, rich home-literacy environments lead to benefits for children in terms of literacy development. While some families regularly participate in literacy-based activities at home, other families are eager to receive ideas about the kind of activities they can do to enhance literacy learning.

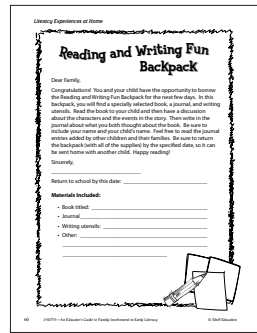
Literacy backpacks are a great way to provide educational opportunities between children and parents. These backpack activities can focus on a variety of literacy topics, including shared reading, reading comprehension, writing development, and language development.

The upcoming pages include instruction sheets to use for several literacy backpacks. You'll find several that have specific literacy activities and one that is generic. This allows you to create a literacy backpack about a topic of your choice. See pages 57–59 for an overview of each backpack activity provided.

Useful Tips for Using Literacy Backpacks

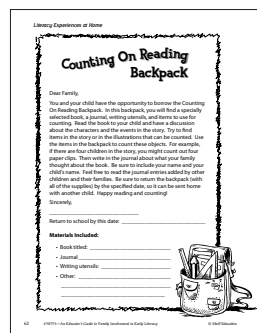
- To create a literacy backpack, you simply provide a few supplies and instructions for how to complete an activity.
- Place the supplies and instructions in a backpack and send it home with a child. Use pillowcases or large resealable plastic bags if backpacks are unavailable.
- It is a good idea to specify a date when the backpack should be returned to school. Use the tracking sheet on page 79 to keep track of each literacy backpack, who has it, and when it is scheduled for return.
- Establish a routine for sending home and collecting backpacks. For example, have children return the backpacks in the morning and send new backpacks home at the end of the day.
- Laminate each backpack instruction sheet for durability.
Note: The backpack instruction sheet for each activity is provided on pages 60–77 and on the Teacher Resource CD.
- If journals are unavailable, make copies of the journal template on page 78 (also on the Teacher Resource CD) and staple the pages together to make your own journal.
- Introduce and explain the literacy backpacks to families at Back-to-School Night. This will communicate the educational purpose, ensure timely return, and increase overall family participation.

Literacy Backpack Activities



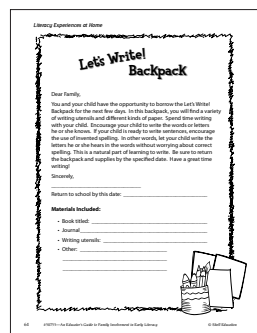
Reading and Writing Fun Backpack

You will need to provide a book, a journal, writing utensils, and a copy of the Reading and Writing Fun Backpack instructions sheet (pages 60–61). This backpack provides families with a way to help build their children’s knowledge of story elements (characters, setting, plot, etc.). Families will have the opportunity to discuss the story and write journal entries about what they read.



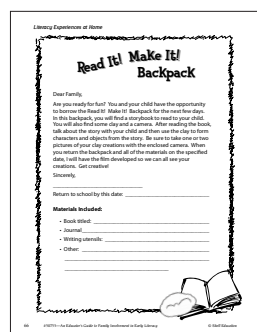
Counting On Reading Backpack

You will need to provide a book, a journal, writing utensils, a set of manipulatives for counting (paper clips, linking cubes, etc.) in a sealable plastic bag or another kind of container, and a copy of the Counting on Reading Backpack instructions sheet (pages 62–63). The purpose of this backpack is to reinforce children’s counting and literacy skills, so it is best to select a book that lends itself to counting.



Let's Write! Backpack

You will need to provide writing utensils (pencils, pens, markers, or chalk), materials to write on (lined paper, construction paper, or a notepad), and a copy of the Let's Write! Backpack instructions sheet (pages 64–65). The purpose of this backpack is to give families the opportunity to write together. You may want to include an envelope filled with sample writing prompts for families to use as a guide. Writing prompts may include such topics as a favorite family meal or a tradition, a story about a family pet, or a special family vacation.



Read It! Make It! Backpack

You will need to provide a book, a container of clay (or salt dough), a disposable camera, and a copy of the Read It! Make It! Backpack instructions sheet (pages 66–67). The purpose of this backpack is to give children and their families the opportunity to reflect on the characters and objects in a story and form them out of clay. Encourage families to capture their creations on film before sending the materials back to school.

Read-Aloud Workshop

Agenda

- Welcome/Introductions (5–10 minutes)
- Why Read Aloud to Your Child? (5 minutes)
- Activity 1: Dialogic Reading (10–15 minutes)
- Activity 2: Fluency Practice (10–15 minutes)
- Activity 3: Track Reading Progress (10 minutes)
- Questions/Share Ideas (5 minutes)

Welcome

Begin by welcoming families and allowing time for them to introduce themselves to one another. You may even want to provide snacks for participants.

Why Read Aloud to Your Child?

Take a few minutes to explain to parents why reading aloud to children is important. Include benefits of reading aloud and how it leads to the development of literacy skills. Also, mention the idea of dialogic reading, which will be explained in further detail. Feel free to use the script below to assist you with this portion of the workshop.

Note: You may want to make arrangements for another teacher or volunteer to take the children to another room or area for a short time to minimize distractions.

Thank you for attending this workshop about reading aloud to your child. Reading aloud to children is one of the things that leads to the development of early reading skills. Taking just a few minutes each day to read aloud to your child has an amazing impact. The National Early Literacy Panel has identified reading aloud as one of the best things parents can do to assist their children in becoming successful readers. During this workshop, I'm going to share with you a few ideas for reading aloud to your child. Hopefully, these ideas will motivate you to engage in daily read-aloud activities with your child.



Activity 1: Dialogic Reading

Explain to families that there is more to reading aloud than just reading. Tell them that reading aloud is often called *shared reading*. It suggests that the experience is shared by both the reader and the listener. This process is also referred to as “dialogic reading,” which suggests dialog or conversation. Explain to families that while reading to their children, they should feel free to talk to them, pointing out things in the illustrations and asking questions about what might happen next. Tell them that they will now have the opportunity to participate in shared reading and practice involving dialog in the reading process. Provide an assortment of books appropriate for the ages of the children in attendance. Allow families to select their books and then go back to their seats to read them together.



Activity 2: Fluency Practice

For the second activity, address the concept of fluency with families. Explain that fluency refers to the process of reading with accuracy, appropriate reading rate, and expression. Tell them that one of the best things for fluency development is for children to hear proper fluency. Mention that children’s books often have wonderful characters whose voices and dialog lend themselves to the telling of the story. We can have all kinds of fun reading aloud to children when we emphasize the expressions of the characters. Briefly demonstrate reading with and without expression to point out the difference in interest. Provide an assortment of books that lend themselves to expressive reading and allow each family to select one. Then allow time for adults to read to their children using expression.



Activity 3: Track Reading Progress

For the final activity, explain to families that making time for reading aloud together can sometimes be difficult. Family life is busy, and we have schedules that sometimes keep us from doing what is important. Tell them that this activity will provide them with a way to track their daily reading progress. If family members in attendance are not reading aloud to their children every day, that’s okay. Encourage them to increase gradually so that they will build a lasting habit. For example, if a family member currently reads to the child three days a week, that family member might want to set a goal to read four days a week and gradually increase to five, six, or (ideally) seven days a week. Provide each family with a few copies of the reading chart on page 137, or send a new chart home with children every month.

Family Literacy Workshops

Questions/Share Ideas

After completing the activities, allow a few minutes for parents to “debrief,” sharing their thoughts, ideas, and questions. Ask them how they might include shared reading experiences in their daily lives at home. As a final note, tell parents that children of all ages benefit from hearing stories read aloud to them. Often when children begin to read, parents are tempted to stop reading to their children in exchange for having the children read aloud to them. While having a child read aloud is certainly a good thing, don’t let this take the place of the valuable and enjoyable experience of reading to the child.

Take-Home Letter

Finally, distribute copies of the Read-Aloud Take-Home Letter to parents. Explain that this letter will remind them of a few things they learned in the workshop and offers more suggestions for engaging in read-alouds at home.

Note: If you plan to send home the read-aloud take-home letters found on pages 135–136 and on the Teacher Resource CD, mention this to parents so they can expect more ideas in future weeks.

Read-Aloud Workshop

Dear Family,

Please join us for a fun workshop about reading aloud to your child. Children are invited! Bring one young child with you to try out different read-aloud strategies and learn about great children's books to read to your child.

Your child is welcome to come!

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Please let us know if you plan to come:

Contact: _____

Phone/Email: _____

Sincerely,



Don't Forget!

Don't forget, we're having a read-aloud workshop! Come join us to learn about fun ways you can enhance your child's beginning reading skills by reading stories. Be sure to bring your child with you.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____



Don't Forget!

Don't forget, we're having a read-aloud workshop! Come join us to learn about fun ways you can enhance your child's beginning reading skills by reading stories. Be sure to bring your child with you.

Date: _____

Time: _____

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Don't Forget!

Don't forget, we're having a read-aloud workshop! Come join us to learn about fun ways you can enhance your child's beginning reading skills by reading stories. Be sure to bring your child with you.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____



Read-Aloud Workshop Take-Home Letter

Dear Family,

Thank you for joining us for the workshop about reading aloud to your child. I hope you were able to learn a few new things and that you had an enjoyable time reading with your child. Remember that reading aloud to your child greatly increases the development of his or her literacy skills. All it takes is a few minutes each day to positively affect your child. Here are a few concepts we discussed at the workshop:

Dialogic Reading: This refers to having dialog or conversation while reading aloud to a child. Be sure to point out illustrations and ask your child questions about the story as you read.

Fluency: This involves reading with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression. As you read to your child, have fun reading with expression and imagining how the characters in the story might speak.

More Activities to Try:

- Go to the library and select books together.
- Keep a list of favorite authors and look for their books at the library and at bookstores.
- After reading a book to your child, act out parts of the story together.
- Ask your child to tell you how he or she thinks certain characters feel about what happens in the story.
- Ask your child to talk about experiences he or she may have had that relate to events in the story.
- Be sure to read the same books over and over again to your child. Children often love to hear stories more than once.

Sincerely,
