

Play, Create, and Learn

Reading, writing, math, science, and social studies come to life with these do-it-yourself activities youngsters will love. You'll boost your little one's skills as you enjoy playing together.



ABC strips

Letter by letter, your child can practice spelling and reading with homemade alphabet strips.

Materials: construction paper, scissors, pencil or markers, tape

Cut colorful paper into four long strips. Help your youngster write the alphabet in large letters, leaving about an inch of space between each letter. Have her tape the pieces into one long alphabet strip.



Now, say a short word (*car, box, sit*), and ask her to spell it by pointing to each of its letters on the strip. As she points, she can say the letters aloud ("c-a-r") and then write the word on another strip of paper. (Give hints as she needs them.) Then, she could use those strips to work on reading the words.

Or your child could draw a word graph of himself. He may start by writing his name straight down in a vertical column for his body. Then, have him write *leg* over and over diagonally where each leg goes, *arm* for his arms, and so on. Maybe he'll draw his parents and siblings to make a word graph family!

Silly rhymes

"My socks have locks!" Laugh along with your child while you turn everyday activities into a rhyming game.

Materials: paper, pencil, crayons

Play with sounds in words while your youngster gets dressed or eats breakfast. For example, have her think of words that rhyme with her clothes (*socks and locks, shirt and dirt, pants and dance*). Then, use the words in funny sentences, and see if she can figure out what you mean. You might say, "It's time to get ready for school. Please put on your *locks* and *dirt*." Then, she could make up a silly sentence for you.

Or use the words to create a funny poem together, such as:

My nice blue pants
Went to the dance
But not the white shirt—
It was full of dirt!

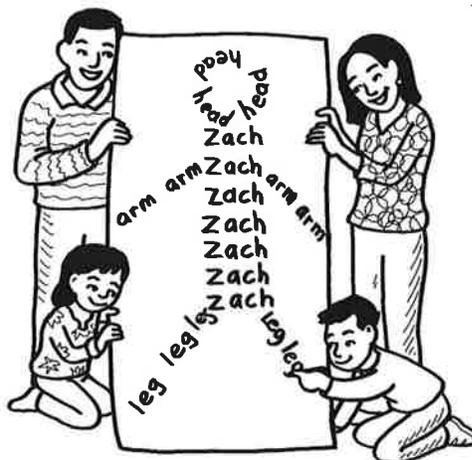
Help your child write the poem on paper. Let her illustrate it and hang it up to display.

Pictures in words

Challenge your youngster to create a word graph—a picture that uses only words—with this clever writing project.

Materials: paper, markers

Suggest that he draw a sun by writing *sun* multiple times, turning the paper around as he goes, to create a circle representing the shape of the sun. He can add the sun's rays by writing the word *ray* over and over in lines extending from the circle in all directions.



Kitchen shapes

Your kitchen isn't filled with just pots, pans, and food. It's also filled with shapes. Play these games of kitchen geometry.

Materials: kitchen items, paper, pencil, scissors

● **Name a shape.** Ask your youngster to find as many circles as possible in your kitchen. *Examples:* plates, cookies, yogurt lids. How many can she locate? Or play the game in reverse. Pick a kitchen item, such as a cutting board, and ask her to identify its shape (rectangle). Now try squares or triangles.

● **Trace a shape.** Using pencil and paper, help your child trace around kitchen items like a measuring cup or a cookbook. Have her carefully cut out the shapes. What pictures could she make with them? For example, she might combine a square and a triangle into a house.



My town

Give your youngster a geography lesson, and a sense of what makes up a community, with this idea.

Materials: markers, large piece of cardboard, recycling-bin items, craft supplies, tape, glue

Suggest that your child use markers to sketch a map of an imaginary community on the cardboard.

He might draw double lines for streets, squares for houses, circles for trees, and rectangles for a school or other buildings. Encourage him to think about what his own community includes, like a fire station, a library, and a park. He could add other fun places, too, such as an amusement park or a zoo.

Next, your youngster can use recycling-bin items or craft supplies to create 3-D houses, stores, trees, and other landmarks on his map. Have him tape or glue them to the cardboard and decorate them. Talk about the town he has created. Ask him to show you the different spots, what they're used for, and who lives or works there.

Marble math

Here's an activity that lets your youngster use marbles to count, estimate, and compare.

Materials: marbles, small containers of different sizes (mini cereal box, bathroom cup, empty vitamin bottle, toilet paper roll with the bottom taped closed)

Have your child fill a container with marbles, dump it out, and count the marbles. Now, let him choose another container and estimate if more or fewer marbles will fill that one. To check his estimate, he can fill the new container and count. If one holds 9 marbles and the other one holds 7, he would say, "9 is more than 7."

Idea: Suggest that he line up the containers in order by the number of marbles they hold.



Solid vs. liquid

Try this gooey experiment to demonstrate the difference between solids and liquids.

Materials: 1 cup water, bowl, 1½–2 cups cornstarch, spoon, food coloring, waxed paper



Have your child measure the water into a bowl and add cornstarch a little at a time, stirring with a spoon or mixing with her hands until the mixture is thick and paste-like. She can stir in a few drops of food coloring to turn it her favorite color and then scrape the mixture onto waxed paper.

Let your youngster scoop up the mixture and roll it into a ball in her hands. Point out that the mixture acts solid like a baseball or an orange. Ask her to open her hands. The ball will melt, as if by magic, and drip onto the waxed paper. Now it acts like a liquid! It's actually a *non-Newtonian fluid*—it acts like a solid when a force acts upon it and a liquid when poured.

Note: Store the mixture in an airtight container, mixing occasionally. Be careful not to get it on furniture, and wash hands after use.