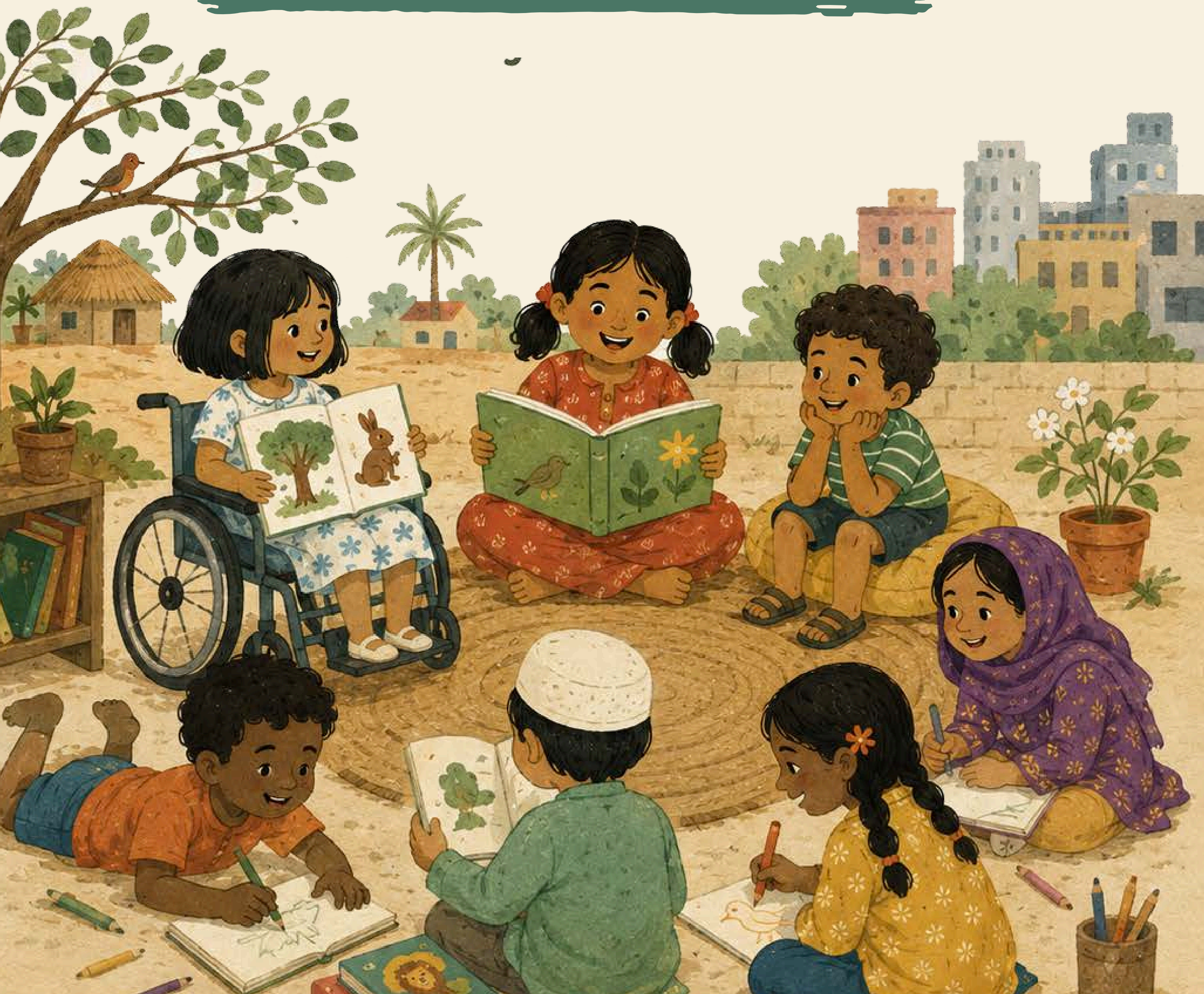


EVERY STORY EVERY READER

A Handbook of Activities to Spark
Curiosity, Creativity, and Conversation



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INTRODUCTION

Reading is far more than decoding words on a page. It is talking, wondering, making, moving, creating, questioning, imagining, and connecting. Yet educators and librarians often need practical, adaptable activities that move beyond traditional reading responses while remaining accessible to children with diverse learning needs. This toolkit was created to address that gap.

We have met educators eager to make reading more joyful, inclusive, and participatory, but with limited time to design activities from scratch. Children also engage with stories in different ways—through discussion, art, movement, play, writing, or quiet reflection. There is no single way to experience a story.

The activities bring together reading, emergent writing, art, movement, and creative expression, helping every child find a meaningful way into literature. Designed with inclusion at their core, they can be adapted for learners with different abilities, interests, and communication styles, making them valuable for neurotypical and neurodivergent children alike. Rather than fixed lesson plans, this toolkit offers flexible ideas for libraries, classrooms, book clubs, and community spaces. Modify or build upon them for your readers and context.

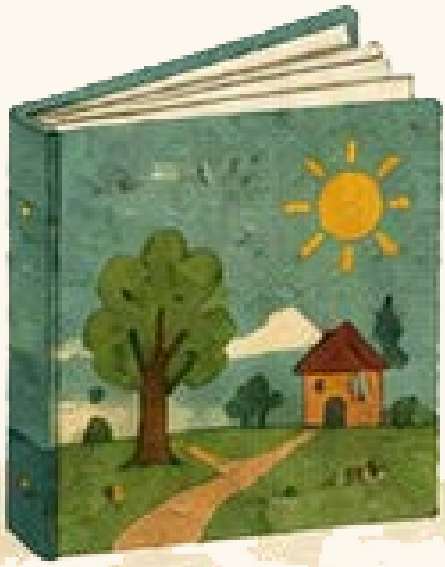
We hope these activities become starting points for richer reading experiences and spaces where every child feels seen, included, and empowered to engage with stories in their own way.



How to use this Handbook

Simple steps
for joyful, inclusive
story sessions. 

1



Choose any
picture book
to share with
your group

2



Start every
session with the
Body Listening
ritual.

3



Pick one
Question Card,
one Literacy
game, and one
extension activity
per session.

4



You don't need to
use every activity
— choose what
fits your group
that day.

5



All activities
work across
multiple
languages.

6



Children's local
language and
code-switching
are always
welcome and
celebrated.



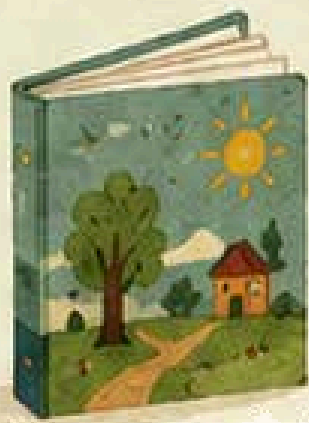
STORY-BASED ACTIVITIES

Question Cards



BEFORE READING

Get ready.
Look at the book.
Make guesses.



DURING READING

Look closely.
Ask, wonder
and predict.



AFTER READING

Think and share.
Connect the
story to your
world.



BEFORE READING

Green Cards

COVER AND GUESS

Builds familiarity with parts of books, kinds of books, and helps them understand directionality. Also helps with thinking about the book and engaging with it.

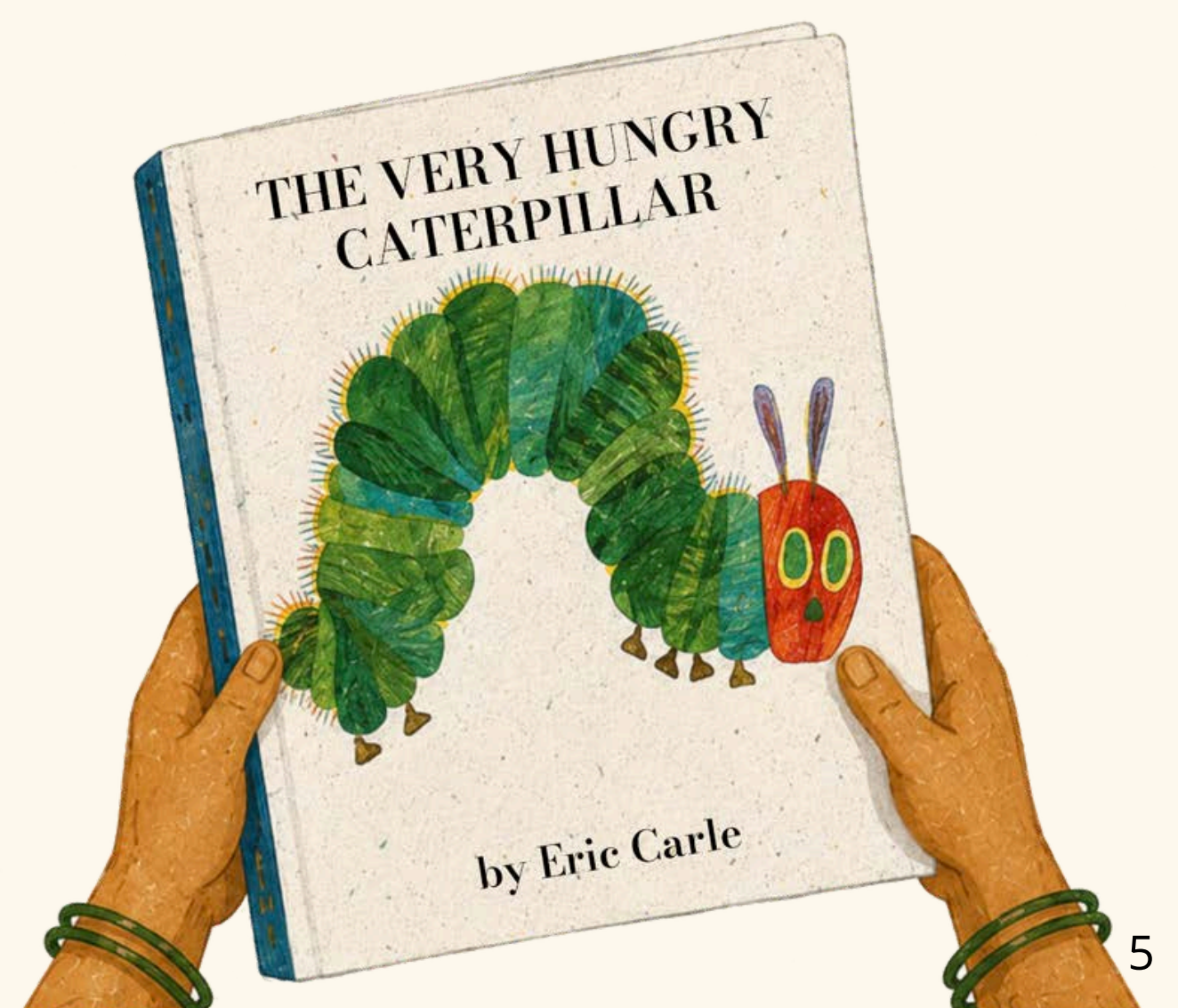
Hold the book with the cover facing the child/children. Point to the cover and ask them what they can see.

Point out how the title is always written so that it stands out. Run your finger left-to-right under the title as you say it slowly.

Point out the name of the author and the illustrator. Who made this book? Who drew the pictures?

TRY ASKING

- Which way shall I hold the book?
- What can you see on the cover?
- Do you think this story is real or make-believe? How can you tell?
- What do you think this story will be about? Why do you say that?
- What do you think is happening in the picture?



DURING READING

Yellow Cards

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Builds vocabulary, attention to detail, and comfort in expressing their thoughts.

Point out to objects or people in the illustrations and ask them what colours they can see, what shapes they can see. (Learn from the children what the names of these things / colours / shapes are in the children's home languages too.) You can also use the **picture flashcards**.

Give wait time. Accept all responses without judgement.

If a child is shy, point to one small thing that you feel sure they can respond to. (What colour is this?/ What shape?)

WHAT DOES THIS WORD MEAN?

Expands active vocabulary and connects new words to children's own lives.

While reading, pause at an interesting word (e.g. enormous, curious, trickle). Ask if anyone has heard the word before. Give a child-friendly explanation and use gestures if you can. Model it in a sentence and ask them if they can make a sentence with it. Come back to the word at the end of the session.

TRY ASKING

- What do you see on this page?
- What is this animal/object called? How do you say that in your language?
- What do you notice in the picture?
- Can you guess what might be on the next page?
- What sounds do you hear in this word? (for rhyming books)
- What do you think will happen next? Why?



TRY ASKING

- What do you think this word means? (point to the word)
- Can you show me what this word looks like with your body?
- What other word means almost the same thing?

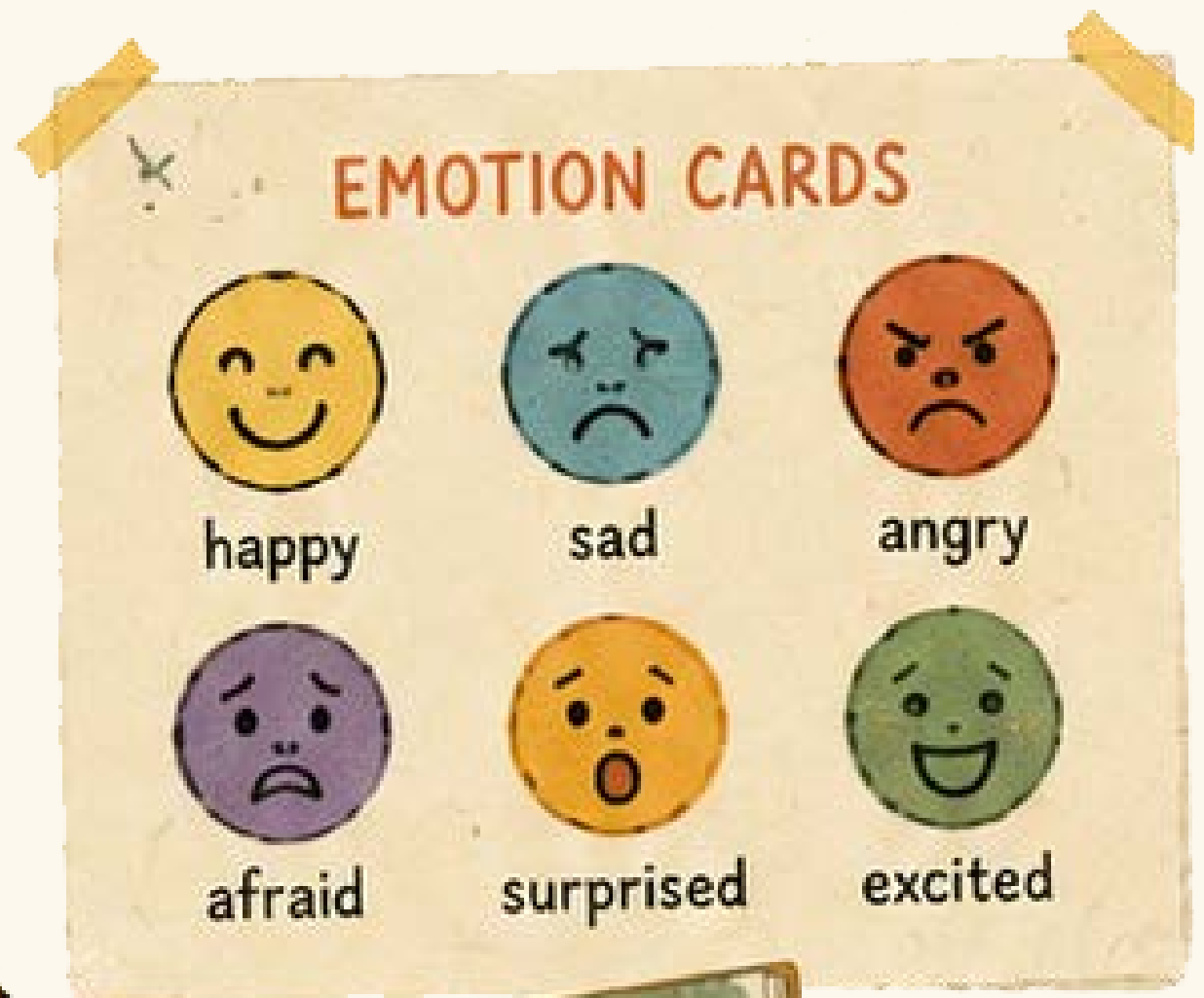
Pick just 2 to 3 interesting words per book per session — not more. Too many words will confuse the children and break the flow too often. For other words that you think are new or unfamiliar to them, quickly explain and move on.

HOW DOES THIS CHARACTER FEEL?

Builds emotional vocabulary, perspective-taking, and social awareness.

Find a page with a character showing a clear expression.

- How do you think the character feels right now? How do you know that?
- Can you show me that feeling on your face? (Or, use the emotion cards for them to point out which feeling it corresponds to)
- When do you feel this way?
- What would you do if you were in this story?



WHY DO YOU THINK SO? (AGES 5 AND ABOVE)

Develops critical thinking, cause-and-effect reasoning, and language.

Pause mid-story and ask one of these prediction questions. After collecting answers, turn the page. Celebrate accurate predictions but don't tell them they are wrong. Instead you could say, "That's an interesting idea. Let's see what happens."



TRY ASKING

- What do you think will happen on the next page?
- Why do you think they did that?
- If you were the character, what would you do?
- What problem does the character have? How might they solve it?

Picture Talk

Builds vocabulary, observation skills, and confidence in expressing ideas through careful looking and open conversation.

Choose a richly illustrated page from any picture book — it does not have to be the one you are reading that day. Hold the book so all children can see the illustration clearly.

Ask open questions (you can use the same question cards) and give plenty of wait time before moving on.

Point to specific details — a shadow, an expression, an object in the background — to draw children's attention to things they might have missed. Accept every response. There are no wrong answers.

Let children ask questions too. If a child asks "why is the sky that colour?" Open it out to the group before answering yourself. "Does anyone have an idea?"

Variation:

Use a picture or photograph that is not from a book at all: a painting, a photograph of a local scene, or an image from a calendar. This shows children that careful looking and thinking can happen anywhere, not only with books.

Tip: Picture Talk works beautifully as an opening activity before you introduce the book, or as a standalone session when you want to slow down and really look together.



Wordless Picture Books

Builds narrative language, storytelling confidence, sequencing skills, and the understanding that pictures carry meaning — without any pressure around text.



A wordless picture book tells its story entirely through illustrations. There are no words to read. The advantage of this is that every child in the group is equally able to engage, regardless of reading level or language background.

- Before reading, show the cover. Ask: "What do you think this story will be about?"
- Open the book slowly, one page at a time. Do not narrate the story. Let the children respond to each image first.
- Use the question cards to ask questions.
- After going through the whole book, invite the children to retell the story together. You can go around the circle, each child contributing one sentence, using the pictures as their guide.



Variations

Give it a voice: Divide children into small groups. Each group looks at a few pages and decides what the characters are saying. They can act it out or simply tell their version. Compare the different versions — celebrate how the same pictures can tell different stories.

Make your own: After exploring a wordless picture book, invite children to make their own — a sequence of drawings that tells a story without any words. These can be as short as three pages: beginning, middle, end.

Tip: Wordless picture books are especially powerful for children who are learning in a second language, children who are shy about speaking, and children who are not yet reading. Every child becomes a storyteller.

Story Walk Posters

Transforms passive listening into an active physical journey — deepens story comprehension and sequencing through movement.

Print each page of the story (without the text) in large size posters (A3 or A2). Lay or hang pages in sequence around the room or outdoor space (you can place the pages in a garden or tape them onto trees). Children walk from page to page and are encouraged to narrate the story.

Leave one page face-down as a surprise. Children predict what the hidden page will show before flipping it.

This activity can be done once in a while as it requires printing and might be expensive for single-use.

Variation: Write a key sentence, phrase, or illustration prompt from each page on slips of paper or chart paper. Children move from clue to clue, reconstructing the story and then comparing it with the original book at different stations.



Story Sequencing Mini Cards

Builds narrative sequencing, story comprehension, and retelling skills through hands-on card manipulation.



Print each page of the story (or draw out if you can) on small cards. After reading, mix up the cards and ask children to work in pairs to put them in order. Once the children have placed the cards in order, each child picks up one card and tells that part of the story.

Provide them with sequence language: first, then, next, finally.

Variation: You can try removing one card and ask children to figure out what is missing.

Story Bingo Cards

Builds focused listening, object recognition, vocabulary, and the joy of participating actively during a read-aloud.



Create bingo cards (3 x 3 or 4 x 4 grid) with images of characters and objects from a book. Each card has a different arrangement of the same images. While reading, when a character or object appears in the illustration, children mark their card (give them stones, seeds, or buttons). The first child to complete a row or a diagonal calls out Bingo.

You can also try emotion bingo cards and children can mark their card when they see a character showing that emotion during the read-aloud.

Before reading, assign sound cues to every child or a small group of children (if the group is large) based on the story. Every time the bird appears, everyone flaps and says 'caw-caw.' Every time it rains — everyone does this with their fingers (drumming on knees).

If you have simple instruments like two stones to click, a rattle made from seeds in a bottle, give them those. Children can whistle like the wind, one can create the sound of footsteps, one does the character's catchphrase.

Read slowly and dramatically.
Children need to listen carefully for their cues.

Sound Effects

Builds active listening, drama skills and phoneme awareness.



Circle Retelling

Builds narrative sequencing, listening, cooperation, and the use of connective language (first, then, next, finally).



Sit in a circle after reading. Explain the sequence words: First ... Then ... Next ... Finally ... You can model this using the story cards. Then get the children to try and retell using the sequence words. If a child is unsure, the group can offer a suggestion (make sure that the more confident ones don't take over the process.)

You can use a 'talking object' to ensure that only the person holding it speaks. This can be a stone or stick or a small toy.

Also try wrong retelling where you tell the story with deliberate mistakes and the children catch your errors and correct them!

Explain to them that we can do different things with our voices — we can speak loudly, softly, fast, slow, high, deep, and express different emotions with it. Choose a line from the book and say it in a monotone and then with appropriate expression. You can be goofy but avoid melodrama.

Variation: You can also give them the same line and ask them to say it in different ways. For example, 'I bought 2 pumpkins from the market.' (say it loud, soft, whisper it, say it very fast, then very slow, in a robotic voice, angrily, happily, sadly, surprisedly, excitedly, etc.)



Voice Play

Builds phonological awareness, expressive language and prosody skills that support fluent reading later.

Freeze Frame

Builds physical expression, scene comprehension, cooperation, and the ability to hold an idea in the body and mind simultaneously.



Choose a key scene from the book — a dramatic moment, a funny moment, or the ending. Assign roles to a small group (3 to 5 children). Others are the 'audience photographers.'

Children act the scene briefly in mime. When you call out 'FREEZE!' everyone holds their position completely still. Ask the audience, what is happening in this picture? How does each character feel?

You can also try "Thought Bubble": while frozen, you tap a character on the shoulder. That character says ONE thought their character is having at that moment. Repeat with the other characters.

LITERACY GAMES



Pick 5 to 6 words from the book read. This could be names of characters, animals or objects in the story.

Say the first word slowly and clap each syllable.

Children repeat and clap along with the facilitator.

Try longer words from the book. Use their own names too.

Clap the Syllables

Develops syllable awareness — a key reading readiness skill

Variation: Stamp feet with each syllable; hold your hand under your chin; say the word like a robot.

Sound / Letter Hunt

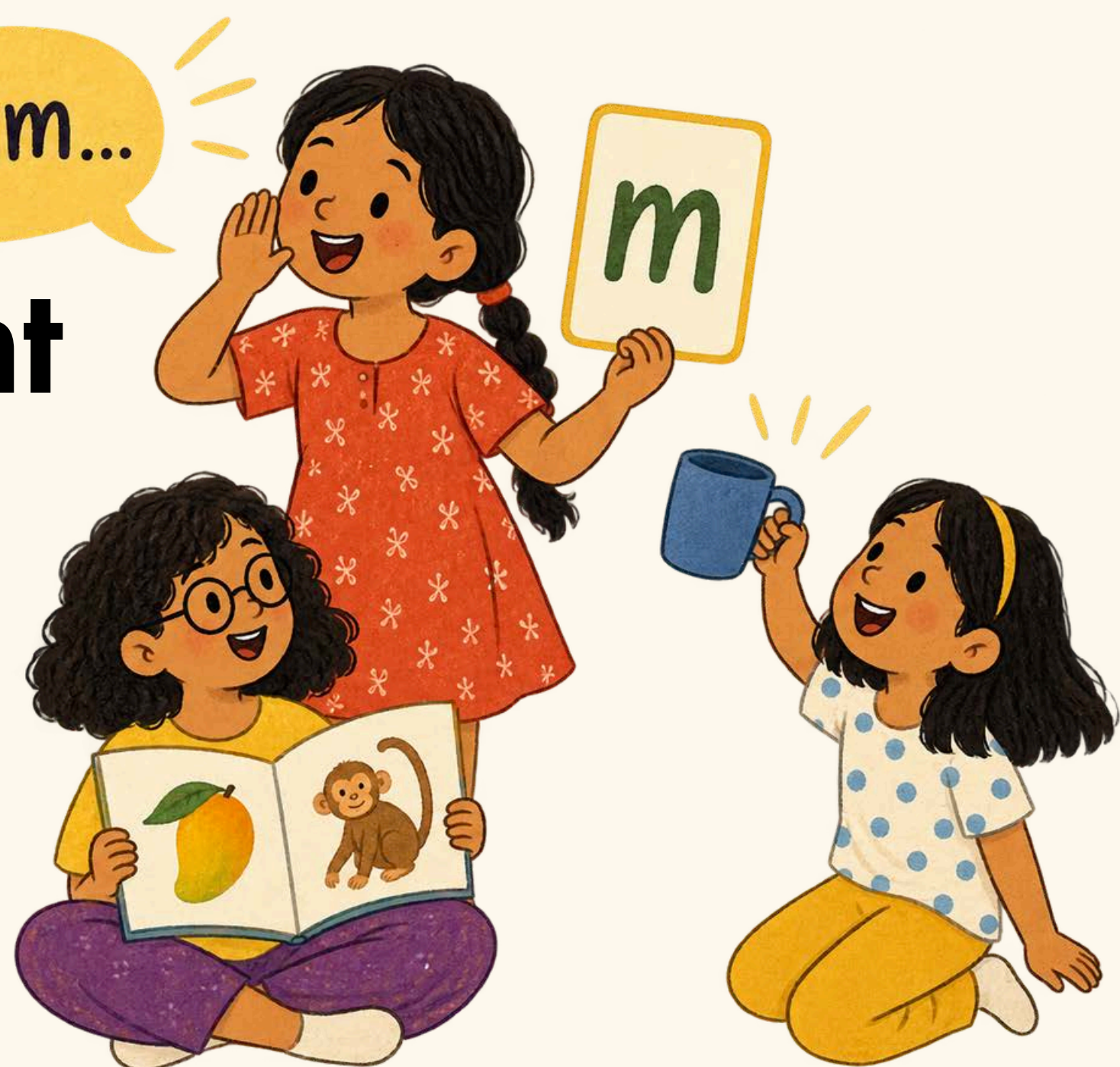
Choose one letter sound from the book — e.g. mmm for mango.

Say, “Let’s look for things that start with mmm.”

Children look around the room and also look for things in the book.

Each time someone finds one, everyone says the word, exaggerating the first sound.

Note: Don’t use the letter name — just the sound. You can show them the corresponding letter flashcard.



Builds phonemic awareness — recognising that words begin with specific sounds or letters.

Rhyme Time

*Builds phonological awareness —
an essential pre-reading skill.*



After reading, pick two simple words from the book that rhyme.

Say them slowly: “hop” ... “pop”.

Ask the children to think of more words that sound like these ones.

Accept nonsense words too — like zop, grop, etc.

Turn it into a song: clap a beat and go around the circle, each child adding a rhyme.

Letter Shape Tracing

Find a large, clear letter on any page of the book.
Trace the letter in the air with your whole arm. Children mirror you.
Repeat this a few times.

Next, trace the same letter on each other's backs.
You can also provide them plates or trays with sand, sooji, or salt so that they can trace it. As an add-on, use child-friendly clay to create and trace letters with children.

Finally, ask them to look for the letter in the book or in signs around the room.

Builds letter recognition through multi-sensory muscle memory.



Word-to-Picture Match

Builds understanding that written words represent spoken words and objects.

Write 4–5 simple words from the book on small cards (draw the letter sequence).

Show children the corresponding picture in the book.

Mix up the cards. Hold up one card and ask: 'Which picture matches this word?'

Point to the word in the book and trace it: 'See — this word says mango.'

Extension: Children can sort cards into groups (animals, food, people).



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Feelings Circle



Develops emotional literacy, self-awareness, and comfort expressing feelings in a group.

Sit in a circle. After reading, ask the children to use their face and show how they are feeling. Alternatively, you could have a chart with faces showing different feelings and ask them to identify which one they identify with.

Name the emotions as children show them.

As the children get used to this activity, you can get them to share why they are feeling that way.

"Today I feel _____ because _____."

All feelings should be acknowledged without judgment.

This activity can be used at the start or the end of a session.

Alternatively, it can be structured as a weekly segment with dedicated time to the Feelings Circle.

Keep this activity under 5 minutes. If a child says "fine" or shrugs/ doesn't want to share, move on. The safety of the circle builds over weeks.



Taking Turns Story

Builds listening skills, impulse control, cooperation, and narrative language.

After reading, invite the children to make a story together. You can use a character from the same book but in a new situation. Start off with a sentence about this.

Pass to the next child. They add one sentence. Keep moving around the circle.

If any child doesn't know what to say or is hesitant, let them pass and come back to them.

Write down or record what the children say and read it back at the end. Hearing their own "story" is magical for young children.

Compliment Pass

Builds listening skills, impulse control, cooperation, and narrative language.

After the session, sit down at the level of the children in a circle. Explain what a compliment is in simple words (a compliment is when you say something kind and true about someone).

Give a compliment to the child on your left. ("I like how you were listening with focus today.")

That child gives a compliment to the child on their left. Continue around the circle until the child on your right gives you a compliment.

Over time, children learn to build their ability to share kind words about others.

If a child gives an appearance-based compliment, gently redirect. ("Can you think of something they did that was kind today?")



Body Listening

*Prepares children for focused listening through a short physical ritual.
Develops self-regulation and focus.*

Before EVERY book session, do this 2-minute routine together

1 Shake your hands fast



2 Then freeze and become perfectly still.



3 Take 3 deep belly breaths together.



4

Point to your eyes and say, "Eyes are ready;" point to your ears, "Ears are ready." Tap your head, "Brain is ready."

Eyes are ready.



Ears are ready.

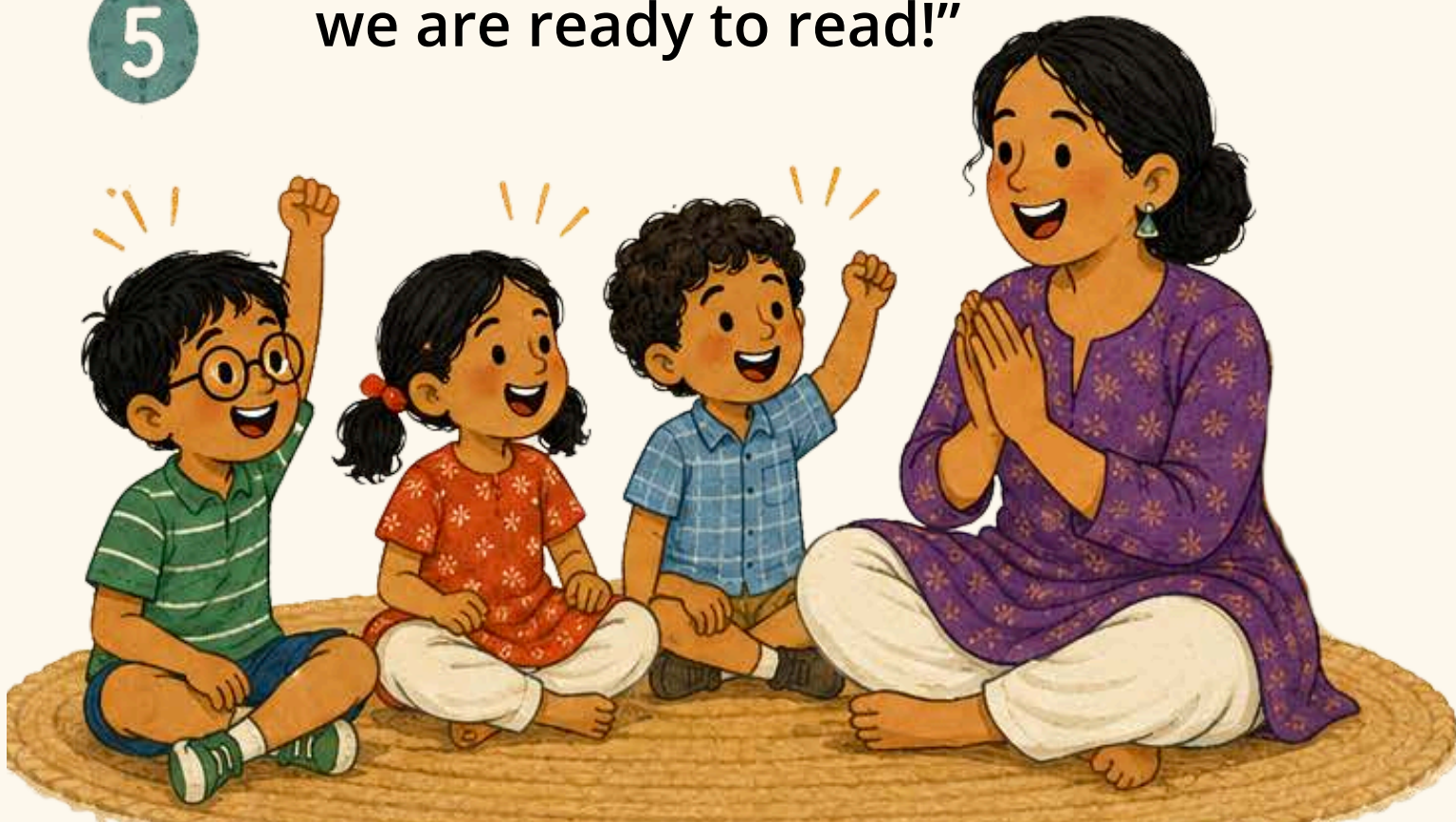


Brain is ready.



Everyone says, "Now we are ready to read!"

5



Do this EVERY session without fail.
Within a couple of weeks, children will start doing it on their own.

OBSERVATION & FOCUS GAMES

Open the book to a detailed illustration. Hold it up so all children can see.

Ask the children to just LOOK at the picture without speaking for 30 seconds. Keep a timer.

After the silence, ask them to share what they noticed. Keep a count on your fingers as children name things — celebrate high counts. Repeat with another page.

You may have to start with 15 to 20 seconds and gradually build it up to 30 to 60 seconds. This is hard to do even for adults.

Silent Look

Develops syllable awareness — a key reading readiness skill.



Spot the Change

Sharpens visual memory and attention.

Select a page from a book which has 3 to 4 elements in an illustration. Show the children the page for about 10 seconds. Ask them to remember whatever they can and close the book.

Make statements about what they saw — some true, some false: There was a red bird (maybe the bird was blue); There were three trees.

Children call out 'Yes!' or 'No!' Show them the page again to confirm. Once they get used to it, you could show them illustrations with a few more elements and increase the observation time commensurate with that.



Ask the children to sit very still and close their eyes. They have to do this for 30 seconds and just pay attention to the sounds they hear while their eyes are shut. After they open their eyes, ask them what sounds they heard and where they thought the sounds were coming from.

Sound Map

Builds deep auditory attention, environmental awareness, and the skill of separating individual sounds from background noise.

Draw a simple map together — a circle for the room and marks for where each sound came from.

To Market, To Market

Builds working memory, sequential recall, careful listening, and vocabulary — all critical pre-literacy skills.



The facilitator starts and says, “I went to the market and I bought... an apple.” The next child has to repeat the line but add an item they bought.

Each child must repeat the whole list IN ORDER before adding their item. If anyone forgets, the group can help them.

You can also try “I went on a trip and I saw...” using characters or objects from the book. Or “I packed my bag and put in a ...”

MOVEMENT GAMES

Suno aur Karo

Builds focused listening, impulse control and the ability to distinguish between instructions.

This is basically the popular children's game, SIMON SAYS. You can use local names like Raja or Rani. Stand in a circle. Explain to the children that they only have to follow the instruction you give them if it is prefaced with "Raja/Rani says." Start slow and simple with things like "Rani says, clap your hands. Rani says, touch your nose." In between, give an instruction without saying "Rani says." You don't need to eliminate children if they make a mistake. Everyone laughs and continues.

If the book you have read has action words, use those actions (for example, if the book describes our daily routine or animal movements).



Red Light, Green Light

Develops self-regulation, body control, sustained attention, and the ability to respond quickly to auditory cues.

The facilitator stands at one end — they are the traffic light. The children stand in a line facing the "traffic light." It is a good idea to mark that line with chalk.

When you call out Green Light, they need to walk towards you (you can use circles — one painted green, one painted yellow and one painted red). When you say or show Red Light, they need to freeze. If they move, they must go back to the start line. When you say or show Yellow Light, they need to move in slow motion.

This game can also use movements that are themed on books they have read with you, such as animal movements, dance steps, etc.



Dance Freeze

Builds listening to non-verbal cues (music starting / stopping), body awareness, and joyful self-expression.

Children spread out in the space. Play some music and give them space to dance freely. When the music stops, they freeze. You can also ask them to freeze in funny positions — Freeze like a sleeping elephant; freeze like a tree in the wind, etc. Get creative. You can use references from the book as well (freeze like you just found something amazing; freeze as if you just saw something scary). Let the children also take turns calling out the freeze pose.

Make sure the children have enough space between them though so that they don't bump into each other.

Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes

Builds body-part vocabulary, sequential memory, listening to sung instructions, and coordination.

The children need to stand in a circle. Teach the song slowly first, touching each part as you name it. Repeat faster each round as they get confident.

Variations: Leave out just one word (hum it) but still touch that body part. Another variation is that you say the word but point to a different body part. It leads to a lot of hilarity.

There is also a version of this rhyme in Hindi.



Echo Game

Builds auditory memory, rhythm awareness, and precise listening — foundational for phonological awareness.



Clap a short pattern: clap-clap-pause-clap. Children echo it back. Start with simple 2-beat patterns and gradually increase to 3 and 4 beats over the session. Add foot-stamps, knee-taps, snaps, etc.

You can also try this with sounds.

Echoing sounds directly exercises phoneme discrimination — the same skill used to distinguish 'pat' from 'bat' when learning to read.

Follow the Leader

Develops sustained visual attention, coordination, patience, and reading other people's cues — a key social skill.

Children stand in a line or in a circle. One person is the leader. Everyone copies every movement the leader makes — arms, legs, face, speed (the leader moves very slowly or very fast).

Switch leaders every round so that everyone gets a turn. The slow-motion version is quite hard and builds focused attention, so do try that.

This can also be done as a mirror game in which students sit in pairs facing each other. One child leads and the other mirrors. After a while they switch.



Guess the Leader

Develops sustained visual attention, coordination, patience, and reading other people's cues — a key social skill.

This is a variation of the previous game. Have students sit in a circle and ask who would like to be the detective. Choose one student and ask them to face away and cover their eyes. Quietly select someone to be the leader without saying their name aloud. The leader stays seated and performs simple movements for the rest of the group to copy. Once the leader begins and everyone is mirroring their actions, invite the detective to stand in the centre of the circle and guess who the leader is.

Choose new detectives and leaders for each round.

Fruit Salad

Builds listening for category words, quick thinking, and comfortable physical movement in a group.



Children sit in a circle and depending on the number, all the children are assigned a fruit like mango, banana, guava (for e.g. for a group of 20 children, use names of 5 fruits. Also, use local fruits that children are familiar with). One child stands in the centre and calls out a fruit — everyone with that fruit must swap seats. The child at the centre also grabs a seat. Whoever is left stands in the middle and calls next. If they call Fruit Salad, everyone swaps seats.

You can use categories from books or vegetables (salad), animals (zoo/jungle), colours (rainbow).

Chowkidaar

Builds focus, stillness, spatial awareness, and silent coordination.



One child sits blindfolded in the centre with a small object (keys, stone, bottle) at their feet. The other children have to take turns to try and stealthily take the object without making a sound. If the chowkidaar hears something, they point directly at the sound. That child sits back down. The child who succeeds in taking the object becomes the next chowkidaar.

Clarify from the start, that children need to be super quiet and make slow deliberate movements.

You can also take characters from the book and name the blindfolded child accordingly (“You are sneaking past the sleeping lion from our story.”)

Hide a small object or the book you are going to read while one child closes their eyes. That child searches the room. The group guides them using verbal cues such as Freezing, Very Cold, Cold, Cool, Warm, Hot, Very Hot, Boiling depending on how close or far they are from the object. No pointing or touching — the colder the cues, the farther from the object the child is.

When the object is found, everyone celebrates. The finder hides the object next and another child needs to look.

Variation: Try getting the children to hum softer and louder depending on how close or far they are from the object.



Hot and Cold

Builds listening to vocal cues, spatial language, persistence, and gentle social support.

Pass the Clap

Builds sustained attention, rhythm, anticipation, and eye-contact — essential for group cohesion.

Stand in a circle. One clap is “passed” from person to person, i.e., each person claps once when the person next to them passes it. Start slow and build speed each round.

Add a reverse rule: two claps = the clap reverses direction.

Variations: Close your eyes and listen for the clap to reach them. Use snaps or other gestures. Or instead of gestures, use a word from the book. And children can choose to change the word and direction.

What's the Time, Mr Wolf?

Builds number sense, listening for a specific cue, physical self-regulation, and fun anticipatory tension.

One child plays the Wolf and stands with their back to the group. The rest of the children are in a line at the opposite end of the room. They slowly tiptoe forward and call out: 'What's the time, Mr Wolf?' The 'wolf' calls out a number like: 'It's 3 o'clock.' The children take 3 steps forward. The children ask again and get closer and closer to the wolf.

At any point, the wolf can call out; 'Dinner time!' and chase all the children back to the wall. If the wolf touches another child, that child becomes the next wolf.



CREATIVE GAMES



Draw Your Favourite Moment

Builds self-expression, fine motor skills, and personal connection to reading.

After reading, give each child paper and crayons. Ask them: 'What was your favourite moment? Draw that moment — your way, your colours.' Walk around and ask each child to describe what they are drawing. Write their words on the page. Display the drawings on a wall or string — this is their 'Book Gallery'. At the next session, look at the gallery together before starting the new book.

Never correct their drawings. A scribble that represents a character is as valid as a detailed sketch. The TELLING is as important as the drawing.



What If?

Builds creative and divergent thinking, imagination, and narrative flexibility.

After reading, pose a 'What if?' question based on the story.

For example, 'What if the animal could talk? What would it say?' 'What if you were in the story? What would you do?'

Let children take turns sharing.

For slightly older children, you can ask questions like: 'What if the story had a different ending?'

'What if this happened in your neighbourhood?'

'What if you could add one new character to the story?'

Invite children to come up with their 'What if?' questions too.

Variation: Link the 'What If' questions to creative expression activities where children answer the question by drawing, working with clay, using body movements, creating a rhyme, etc.

Act It Out

Builds imagination, body expression, language recall, and social cooperation.

Choose a short section of the story.

Ask children to choose their roles. Narrate slowly while the children act.

Encourage them to improvise and add their own dialogues. Switch roles so more children get to play each character. If you have handy props, that helps increase engagement. Acting deepens story memory.



Make a New Cover

Builds print awareness, creative design thinking, and ownership of literacy.

After reading a story to them, show the children the book cover again and ask them why books have covers. Ask them to name what they see — the picture, the title, the author's name.

Give each child a piece of paper folded in half and ask them to draw their own version of the cover.

Ask them to share why they chose that particular picture. Even if they can't write, encourage them to scribble a title (or you can write it for them) and the author's name. For the illustrator's name, you can add their name. You can even staple a few pages together and get them to narrate the story in pictures the way they understood it.

This activity helps children to see themselves as MAKERS of books, not just receivers. This shift is powerful for long-term reading identity.

Character Poster



Builds character analysis, personal response to literature, descriptive language, and visual-verbal connection.

After reading, ask: 'Which character stayed in your mind? Your favourite, your least favourite, or the one you want to know more about.'

Give each child a large sheet of paper. Draw the character in the centre. Add details: name, what they like, what they eat, where they live, one thing you want to ask them.

You can do the writing on their poster as they dictate. Display the posters. Children 'introduce' their character to the group.

FLASHCARD SETS



Letter Sound Hunt Cards

Connects phonemes to real objects and builds phonological awareness

Prepare cards with one large letter per card. For English letters, make upper and lower case cards. Laminate for reuse and durability. Print letters large — at least A6 size so that the whole group can see.

Hold up the letter card and say the sound slowly: 'Ssss ... what starts with sssss?' Children look at the open book pages or around the room and find objects beginning with that sound. Celebrate each find and write the words on a board or chart as they name them.

You can also play this in reverse: Point to an object in the book and ask the children to find the letter card that matches its starting sound.

Object & Animal Picture Cards

Builds vocabulary in different languages and connects picture cards to book illustrations. Honours children's home languages.

Prepare picture cards — one clear image per card with the name of the animal or object written below. Make cards with common animals and everyday objects, food, and from nature.

Before reading, spread 6 – 8 cards face up. Children name each one. Read the book. When a matching object appears in the illustrations, children hold up the right card. Ask them what they call this object in their home language. Write down the home-language word on a sticky note and add it to the card (never correct a child's home-language word — write it down and celebrate it.)

Variation: You can try 'I have, who has?' Each child holds a card and waits for someone else to describe it either through sounds or visual descriptions. For example, you will say, "I have a crow. Who has an animal that says 'baa baa'?"





Emotion Flash Cards

Prepare cards with large drawn faces with different expressions on A5 cards. Laminate if possible for durability. Draw faces with distinct features — rounds eyes for surprise, downturned mouth for sad, furrowed brow for angry, etc.

While reading, pause at a moment of strong emotion. Hold up all cards face-out. Ask children which card shows how the character is feeling. After children make their pick, ask them to explain why they chose that emotion, and encourage them to recreate the emotion using their face and body language.

You can also use these cards for a daily check-in. Each child picks the card that shows how THEY feel that day.

Emotion pairs: Spread cards face down in two sets. Children find matching emotion pairs such as contrasting emotions (happy and sad) or similar emotions (happy and excited). Or sort into 'comfortable feelings' and 'uncomfortable' feelings. Please take care to normalise all emotions and not judge them.



BOOKMAKING ACTIVITY GUIDE



Why Bookmaking Matters

When a child makes a book, they become an author. They understand from the inside that books are made by people — people just like them. This single shift transforms their relationship to reading. Children who have made books are more motivated to read, more aware of print conventions, and more willing to take risks as storytellers and writers.



Book Formats



THE FOLD BOOK
Ages 3–5 · Easy · No staples

One A4 sheet folds and cuts into an 8-page book — no tools beyond scissors. Steps: fold lengthwise, fold widthwise, fold once more, unfold to first fold, cut a slit along the middle section only, push both ends inward until the book pops open. Pages 1 and 8 are the cover and back; pages 2–7 are for the story. The magic moment when it pops open is genuinely thrilling — practice it yourself many times before the session.



**THE ACCORDION /
LEPORELLO BOOK**

Ages 3–6 · Easy

Tape 2–3 A4 sheets end to end. Fold back and forth like a fan — each panel is one page. Can be read as a book or unfolded and pinned to the wall as a story timeline. Ideal for "First... then... next... finally..." retelling since children can see the whole sequence laid flat. Perfect for a collaborative class story where every child contributes one panel.



THE STAPLE BOOK
Ages 4–6 · Medium

Stack 2–3 A4 sheets, fold together, staple twice along the spine. Children experience the full anatomy of a real book: cover, spine, pages, back. Add a title page: Title, "Written and illustrated by [name]", Date. A coloured card cover makes it feel substantial enough to take home and treasure. Children are far more likely to share a book that looks and feels real.



THE SHAPE BOOK

Ages 3–5 · Medium

Cut cover card into a simple silhouette — a mango, a bird, a pot, a fish. Trace the shape onto 3–4 plain sheets for inner pages. Staple or tie with thread through a hole punch. Children draw one scene per page inside the shape. Displayed on a string, shape books look beautiful and become a source of pride. Keep the shape simple — a round pot or a fish are ideal; complicated shapes frustrate young children.



THE WORDLESS PICTURE BOOK

Ages 3–6 · Easy

Give each child a blank fold or staple book. Only pictures — no words needed at all. Each page is one moment in the story. When done, the child "reads" their book aloud to the facilitator or a partner. Helper can write the child's narration lightly below each picture if the child wishes. After making wordless books, look at a real Pratham wordless book together — children see that their books are exactly like published books. Enormously affirming. A child who cannot write can absolutely be an author.



Book Themes

ALL ABOUT ME

Ages 3–5

The most motivating first book — children are the expert on themselves. Page structure: My name and face · My family · My home · My favourite food · Something I am good at · Cover.

These books become treasured family objects. Send them home with a note: "Your child wrote this book. Please ask them to read it to you." Many families keep them for years.

Variation: "All about my neighbourhood" — the market, the well, the tree we play under.

RETELLING A BOOK

Ages 4–6

Children recreate each scene in their own drawing — no copying, their own interpretation. Helper writes their dictated version. Compare with the original: "What did you change? What stayed the same?"

Variation: "The other character's story" — retell from the point of view of a background character. What did the crow see? What did the grandmother think? A powerful perspective-taking exercise.

A BOOK ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

Ages 4–6

Pages can be: the market, the water tap, the tree we play under, the chai-wala, the river. Validates the child's environment as worthy of literature — counters the message that books are always about other places. Ask families to contribute: can a grandparent come and tell a story about a local place that goes into the book?

AN INVENTED STORY

Ages 5-6

Warm up by inventing a character together. Children choose their own character, problem, and ending. Use the 3-finger planning tool: beginning (finger 1), middle/problem (finger 2), ending (finger 3). Author's reading at the end — audience asks one question. Variation: give all children the same opening sentence ("One morning, a crow found a golden seed...") — each child continues differently. Display all versions side by side.

A COUNTING OR ALPHABET BOOK

Ages 4–6

Each page has one number (children draw that many things) or one letter/akshar (children draw things starting with that sound). Children choose their own examples — not prescribed. Finished books go into the book corner as reference books the whole group can use.

Multilingual variation: each page has the word in three languages — children teach each other.



The Process

SETTING UP THE SPACE

Prepare all blank books before the session — the reveal of a blank book should feel special. Set materials in the centre: one shared crayon set per 3–4 children. Designate a drying/finishing spot. Have a "facilitator scribe" area where children come to you to have their words written. Limit the session to one book format — two at once creates confusion.



HELPER AS SCRIBE

Sit beside the child, not in front — they are the author, you are the assistant. Ask: "What is happening on this page? Tell me." Write exactly what the child says — their words, their syntax, their dialect. Do not correct it into standard language. Read back what you wrote, pointing to each word. If the child wants to change it, cross out and rewrite — show that words can be revised. This is how authors work. Write in the child's home language if that is what they dictate. A book in Rajasthani dialect is just as valid as one in standard Hindi.

THE AUTHOR'S CHAIR

Designate one special seat in the space. At the end of each bookmaking session, 2–3 children volunteer to sit in it and read their book aloud. Audience gives one compliment ("I liked the part where...") and asks one question ("I want to know more about..."). Always voluntary — never force a reading. Once a few children have experienced the warm response, nearly every child wants a turn.

Celebrating Books

CLASS BOOK CORNER

Child-made books displayed alongside Pratham books sends the most powerful possible message: your stories belong here. Label each book with its author's name on the spine.

When a book becomes worn and loved, that is a success — it has been read many times. A rotating "featured book" display (one book highlighted per week) is a simple way to keep the corner alive and noticed.

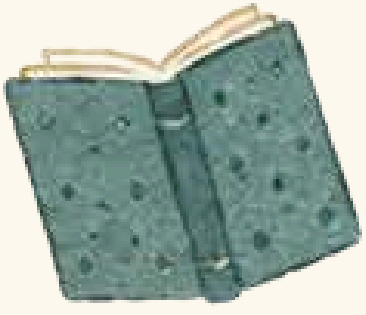


BOOK LAUNCH DAY

Once a month: children bring finished books, set up a display on the mat, each author introduces their book. Audience gives one compliment per book. Books are added to the book corner. Invite one family member if possible — even one grandparent per launch transforms the event. A simple borrowing system (name, book title, date in a notebook) introduces children to the library concept.

BOOKS AS GIFTS

"Today we are making a book as a gift for someone at home." Children decide who, think about what that person would love, and make the book with that audience in mind. Wrap in newspaper or cloth. Child delivers and reads it to the recipient. Ask children to report back the following week: "What happened when you gave your book?" These stories — of grandmothers who cried, of fathers who kept the book — are among the most powerful evidence of what this programme achieves.



INCLUDING EVERY CHILD

Responsive planning starts with the facilitator's mindset.

Every child can participate in every activity in this toolkit — but participation looks different for different children. The adaptations in this guide are not a separate programme; they are adjustments to what you are already doing. Most cost nothing and require no extra materials. The goal is always the same: that every child experiences themselves as a capable, valued member of the group. Here are some basic principles to follow when working with children.

MULTIPLE WAYS TO RESPOND

Always offer at least two ways a child can show what they know — speaking, pointing, drawing, nodding, acting, using a card.

NO SPOTLIGHTING

Never single out a child's difference in front of the group. Adaptations are offered quietly and naturally to the whole group where possible.

WAIT TIME MATTERS

Give at least 10 seconds after asking a question before moving on. Many children need longer to process before responding

PEERS AS PARTNERS

Pair children strategically. A child who needs support often thrives when paired with a patient, kind peer — not always the "strongest" child.

These are some gentle, non-clinical signs for us to look out for — not to label, but to adapt. If you notice several of these patterns in one child, try the relevant adaptations and see what helps.

Important: These signs do not mean a child has a disability. Many are typical at certain ages, or reflect hunger, tiredness, stress at home, or simply being new to the group. Observe across multiple sessions before drawing any conclusions — and never share observations with anyone other than a trusted supervisor or the child's family, and only with care.

Possible neurodivergence

- Gets very distressed when routines change unexpectedly
- Focuses intensely on one object or topic for a very long time
- Finds it hard to shift from one activity to the next
- Interprets instructions very literally — misses implied meaning
- Lines up objects, sorts, or organises things repeatedly
- Has strong, specific reactions to certain textures, sounds, or smells
- Prefers to play alongside others rather than with them



Possible sensory needs

- Covers ears, squints, or hides face in response to sensory input
- Refuses to touch certain materials (sand, glue, clay)
- Seems overwhelmed in noisy or crowded settings
- Seeks constant movement — spinning, rocking, jumping
- Or the opposite: avoids all physical movement, sits very still
- Puts objects in mouth beyond the typical age for this
- Gets easily overwhelmed and needs time alone to recover



Possible physical / motor needs

- Difficulty holding a crayon, pencil, or small object
- Tires quickly during physical activities
- Avoids activities that require balance or coordination
- Struggles to sit on the floor for extended periods
- Has noticeably asymmetrical movement or uses one side of the body less
- Takes much longer than peers to complete cutting, drawing, or folding tasks

Possible communication differences



- Uses significantly fewer words than peers, or no words at all
- Echoes back what others say rather than responding (echolalia)
- Uses gesture, pointing, or pulling the facilitator's hand to communicate
- Speaks clearly but struggles to follow multi-step verbal instructions
- Understands much more than they can express verbally
- Becomes frustrated when not understood — may act out or withdraw

Possible attention differences

- Moves away from group activities within 2-3 minutes
- Acts impulsively — calls out, grabs, moves before instructions are finished
- Has difficulty waiting for a turn
- Is easily distracted by sounds, movement, or objects nearby
- Can focus deeply on something they choose, but not on facilitator-led tasks
- Forgets instructions immediately after hearing them



Possible visual impairment

- Sits very close to the book or holds objects very near to their face
- Squints, rubs eyes frequently, or tilts head when looking at something
- Misses objects or people on one side of their visual field
- Bumps into things or misjudges distances when moving
- Has difficulty with matching, sorting, or spotting differences in pictures
- Responds better to large objects and high-contrast images than to small pictures

Possible hearing impairment

- Does not respond when called by name from behind or at a distance
- Watches the facilitator's face and mouth very carefully when listening
- Asks for instructions to be repeated, or follows only when others move
- Speaks very loudly, or speech is unclear compared to peers
- Seems confused or withdrawn in noisy environments
- Responds well to visual cues but misses purely verbal instructions





QUICK REFERENCE CARD



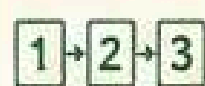
The single most important adaptation for each need type — across all activities. Print, laminate, and keep with your book box. ❤️



NEURODIVERGENT



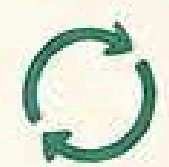
- 1 Give a brief preview before every activity begins



- 2 Keep routines consistent — same order every session



- 3 Allow observation before participation



- 4 Never penalise repetition — it is consolidation



- 5 One instruction at a time

SENSORY NEEDS



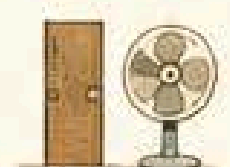
- 1 Warn before any sudden loud sound or movement



- 2 Always offer an alternative to skin-contact materials



- 3 Allow a fidget object during sitting activities



- 4 Seat away from doors, fans, or unpredictable noise



- 5 A quiet corner to recover is not a punishment

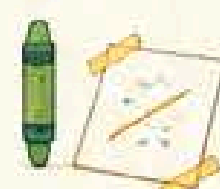
PHYSICAL / MOTOR



- 1 Every activity has a seated version — plan it in advance



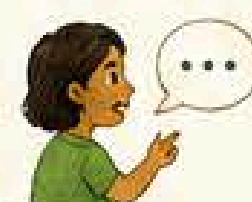
- 2 Pre-prepare materials so assembly is not a barrier



- 3 Chunky crayons and taped-down paper for all making

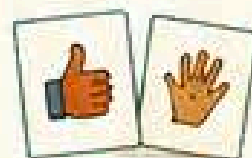


- 4 Director / narrator roles are as central as performer roles



- 5 Dictation to facilitator is full authorship

COMMUNICATION



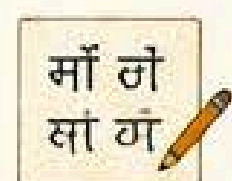
- 1 Always offer a non-verbal way to respond



- 2 Narrate what the child communicates: "You pointed to..."



- 3 Wait at least 10 seconds before moving on



- 4 Write in the child's home language — it is valid



- 5 A wordless book is a complete book

ATTENTION



- 1 Short bursts — 5 min max per activity for young children



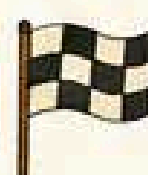
- 2 Movement break between every two sitting activities



- 3 Give active "audience jobs" during waiting turns

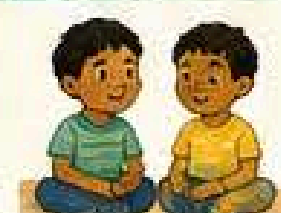


- 4 Visual timer so children know how long remains



- 5 Bounded roles with clear start and end

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT



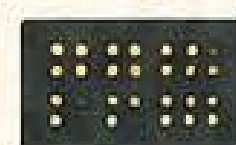
- 1 Seat closest to the facilitator and the book



- 2 Describe every image aloud as you show it



- 3 Use real objects, not pictures, wherever possible



- 4 Raised-outline and tactile materials for literacy



- 5 Always pair with a sighted partner for movement

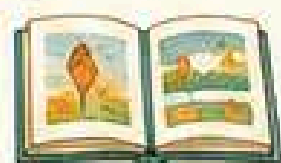
HEARING IMPAIRMENT



- 1 Seat where child can always see your face



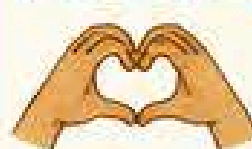
- 2 Every spoken cue needs a visual equivalent



- 3 Show pictures before reading — never rely on words alone



- 4 Use exaggerated face and gesture throughout



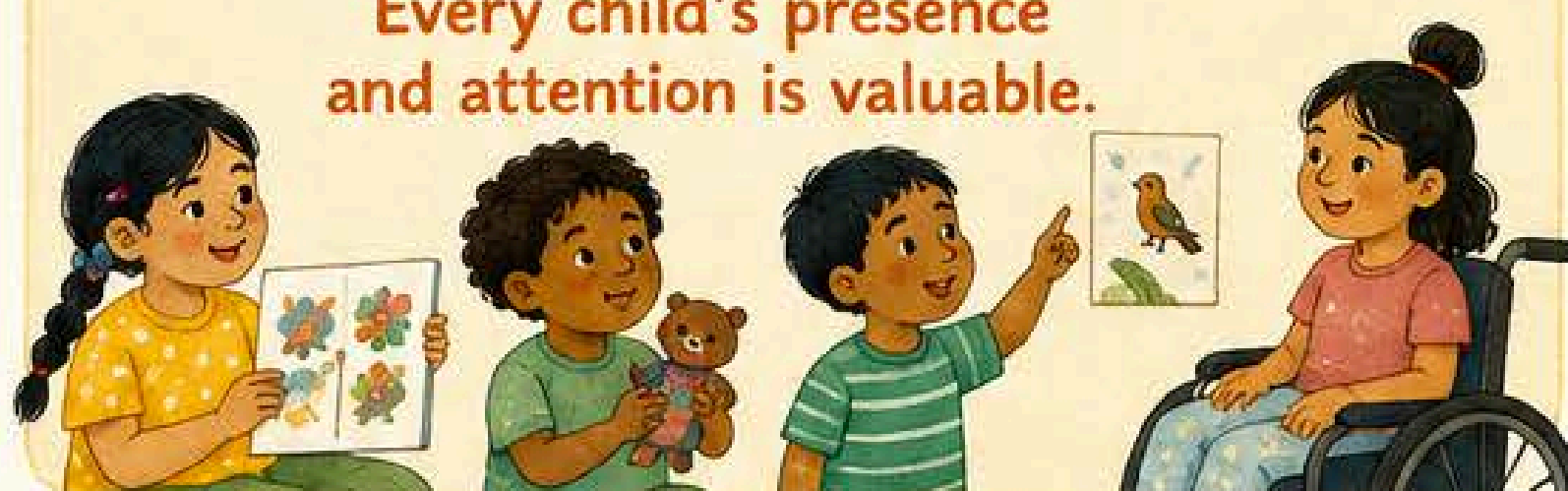
- 5 Learn a few signs in the child's sign system

THE ONE RULE ABOVE ALL OTHERS:

A child who is in the room, watching, holding an object, or pointing at a page is participating. ❤️

Full physical or verbal engagement is not the only valid form of participation.

Every child's presence and attention is valuable.



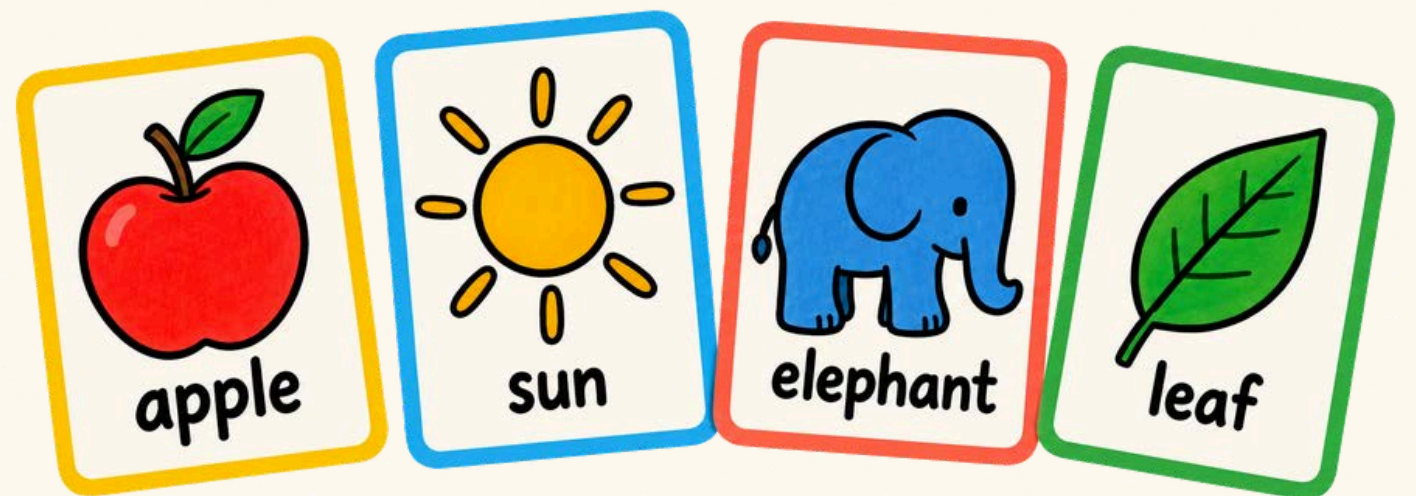
ADAPTING PHYSICAL MATERIALS

Simple, low-cost modifications to flashcards, bingo cards, prop boxes, and sequencing materials that make them accessible to all children.

Flashcards

SIZE AND CONTRAST

- Minimum A5 size for all group flashcards — A4 for groups of 10+
- Bold, simple images — no small background detail
- Black outline on white or cream/pale yellow background is the most universally readable
- Print text in at least 18pt bold font below each image



TACTILE VERSIONS

- Glue a small real object or texture to the card (a feather for "bird", a seed for "tree")
- Trace letter outlines with Fevicol — when dry, raised letters can be felt
- Glue thick string along letter shapes for tactile letter recognition
- Sand-paper letters: stick sandpaper cut into letter shapes on card

MULTILINGUAL AND SYMBOL CARDS

- Add a symbol or gesture picture alongside the word — supports children who process visual symbols more easily than text
- Leave one blank line on each card for families to add the home-language word
- Emotion cards: include a body posture drawing alongside the face — some children read bodies better than faces

Durability Tip: Laminate all flashcards. If a laminator is unavailable, cover both sides with wide clear tape and trim the edges. Cards handled by 20+ children per day need to last months.

Bingo Cards

SIZE AND LAYOUT

- 3x3 grid (9 squares) for 3–4 year olds — fewer items, less overwhelming
- 4x4 grid (16 squares) for 5–6 year olds only
- Each square minimum 4x4cm — large enough to place a token clearly
- Bold black border around each square — helps children with visual processing distinguish one square from the other.

TOKENS AND MARKING

- Tokens should be large enough to grip easily — bottle caps, large seeds, or smooth stones (not small beads)
- For children with limited hand control: use a larger token (a folded cloth square) that is easier to place
- Alternatively: dry-wipe marker on laminated card — child draws an X on each match. Wipes clean for reuse
- Brightly coloured tokens are easier to see against a white card background

ACCESSIBILITY VERSIONS

- High-contrast version: print images in black and white with thick outlines for children with visual processing differences
- Reduced card: a 2x2 grid (4 squares) for children who are overwhelmed by choice or have attention differences
- Emotion bingo: use very large, clearly distinct faces — one emotion per square — to avoid confusion between similar expressions



High-contrast version



Reduced card (2x2)



Emotion bingo





Prop Box

SENSORY-AWARE PROPS

- Include props with varied textures — smooth, rough, soft, hard — so children with sensory needs can choose what they are comfortable holding
- Avoid props with very strong smells or that make unpredictable sounds
- Always offer "no-touch" options — a child can point to a prop rather than hold it
- Clean props regularly — many children are sensitive to unfamiliar smells

MOTOR-ACCESSIBLE PROPS

- Puppets with large openings are easier to use than finger puppets for children with limited fine motor control
- Stick puppets (a picture taped to a stick) are the most accessible puppet format — gripped in the fist, not the fingers
- Props should be large enough to grip with a full hand — avoid very small objects
- A prop on a string that can hang around the neck frees both hands for children with limited grip

VISUAL AND TACTILE PROPS

- Real objects are always more accessible than pictures for children with visual impairment — a real mango, a real leaf, a real stone
- Each prop in a mystery bag should have a distinct texture so children can identify by touch alone
- Label prop boxes with both a word and a picture — children who cannot read can still independently choose and replace props



Sequencing and Story Cards

PHYSICAL FORMAT

- Playing-card size is fine for most children — but make a larger set (postcard size) for children with visual or motor differences
- Round the corners of laminated cards — sharp corners can be distressing for sensory-sensitive children and dangerous for impulsive ones
- Add a number in the corner in very small print — facilitators can use this to check the correct sequence without revealing it to children

ACCESSIBILITY ADAPTATIONS

- For children with visual impairment: add a raised dot or texture to each card to distinguish front from back
- Reduced set: 3 cards (beginning, middle, end) rather than one card per page — less overwhelming and equally effective for sequencing learning
- For non-verbal children: sequencing cards are a communication tool — a child can point to cards to retell a story without any spoken words
- Store each set in a cloth bag labelled with the book's name — children with organisational differences can independently find and return sets

VISUAL AND TACTILE PROPS

- Real objects are always more accessible than pictures for children with visual impairment — a real mango, a real leaf, a real stone
- Each prop in a mystery bag should have a distinct texture so children can identify by touch alone
- Label prop boxes with both a word and a picture — children who cannot read can still independently choose and replace props

RESPONSIVE PLANNING

Different needs and the single most important rule for each.



NEURODIVERGENT



- Give a brief preview before every activity.
- Keep routines consistent.
- Allow observation before participation.



SENSORY NEEDS



- Warn before sudden sounds or movements.
- Always offer an alternative to skin-contact materials.



PHYSICAL / MOTOR



- Every activity has a seated version.
- Plan it before the session.
- Director roles are as important as performer roles.



COMMUNICATION



- Always offer a non-verbal way to respond.
- Wait at least 10 seconds.
- Narrate what the child communicates.



ATTENTION



- 5-minute maximum per task.
- Movement break between every two sitting activities.
- Bounded roles with clear start and end.



VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

- Seat closest to the facilitator.
- Describe every image aloud.
- Use real objects rather than pictures.



HEARING IMPAIRMENT



- Always face the child when speaking.
- Every spoken cue needs a visual equivalent.
- Show pictures before reading.



EVERY CHILD PARTICIPATES

- Every child who is in the room, watching, or pointing at a page is participating.



REMEMBER



- There are no wrong answers. Accept all responses.
- Code-switching between local languages is a strength.
- Repeat favourite activities — children learn through repetition and ritual.
- One book can be used for 3 to 4 different sessions.

Every child who is in the room, watching, or pointing at a page is participating.



LIBRARIANS OF INDIA

This work was developed as part of the Librarians of India initiative.

Librarians of India is an open community in service of children. Its objective is to strengthen libraries all over India, as libraries are an integral part of a child's learning journey. It does so by celebrating librarians, sharing their stories and learnings, and providing them with a platform to learn and grow together so their libraries can become vibrant spaces where children can thrive.

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