


PLAYING PRESCHOOL

HOMESCHOOL CURRICULUM

YOU ARE YOUR CHILD'S BEST TEACHER

A pair of hands is shown from a top-down perspective, holding a collection of colorful, fuzzy pom-poms. The pom-poms are in various colors including blue, green, pink, red, yellow, and orange. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with fingers gently holding the pom-poms. The background is a solid, dark blue color.

SUSIE ALLISON, M.ED.



START-UP GUIDE

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

If you're anything like me, you need to see the big picture before things can shrink down to the nitty gritty details. Here's what Playing Preschool looks like as the "year" progresses. **Remember that each unit is two weeks long.** The program is 38 weeks/190 days which is similar to a traditional school year.

UNIT THEME	LETTER	UNIT THEME	LETTER
1 Apples	Aa	11 On the Farm	Ff
2 Colors	Rr	12 Weather	Ww Kk
3 Nursery Rhymes	Nn	13 Eggs	Ee
4 Clothing	Cc Jj	14 Plants	Pp Ll
5 Food	Mm	15 Construction	Yy Zz
6 Five Senses	Ss	16 Pets	Dd
7 Teddy Bears	Bb	17 Opposites	Oo Xx
8 Things That Go Together	Qq Uu	18 Fairy Tales & Folk Tales	Gg Vv
9 Community Helpers	Hh	19 Water	Ii
10 Transportation	Tt		

WHY ARE THE LETTERS NOT TAUGHT IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER?

1. I don't want kids dependent on order alone. I want each letter learned on its own.
2. I needed to double up on a few letters so I put "easy" letters, like Jj and Cc, together (letters that look the same in upper and lower case). "Tricky" letters, like Ee and Aa, that look different in upper and lower case, are introduced on their own.
3. In some units, I was able to have the letter match the theme (like Tt and Transportation).

HOW TO READ A UNIT

UNDERSTANDING THE WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Let's break down a weekly overview. I created these to give you a snapshot at how the week looks. These always helped me as a teacher to see a complete overview of how the week would progress.

GOALS: General goals for the unit and what will be taught

APPLES WEEK 1

QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK
What are the parts of an apple? How do apples grow?

QUESTIONS OF THE WEEK: Guiding questions to ask your child to check for new learning of the theme

GOALS: Kids will learn about apples, and to identify and tell some parts of an apple, where apples come from, and what we use apples for.

	MONDAY (predicting & sorting)	TUESDAY (letter name & numbers)	WEDNES. (predicting & measuring)	THURSDAY (letter name & numbers)	FRIDAY (recall & retell & shapes)
READ ALOUD	<u>Hello, World! How Do Apples Grow?</u>	<u>Hello, World! How Do Apples Grow?</u>	<u>An Apple's Life</u>	<u>An Apple's Life</u>	<u>Apple Picking Day!</u>
THINGS TO TALK ABOUT	Introduce apples: Take a closer look	Introduce letter Aa for Apples Find the letter Aa in the book	Discuss how apples grow	Reread book – review letter Aa Find the letter Aa in the book	Recall information about apples
LEARNING ACTIVITY	Math: Sort apples into three groups	Alphabet Hunt: Flashlight Find the letter Aa	Math: Compare the apples by size	Math & Art: Stamp apples in groups of 5	Math: What else is shaped like an apple? Walk around house
EASY ACTIVITY	Art: Stamp apples	Math: Apple count - Counting 1 – 5 with five frame	Art: Make an apple orchard.	Literacy: Find food that starts with Aa in the pantry	Sensory: Apple sauce sensory bin

The day's lessons/activities

DAILY LESSONS / ACTIVITIES

Each day has four lessons/activities to complete. In total, this should take about 45 minutes to 1 hour (depending on how long your child plays with each activity). These lessons can be done while a baby naps.

BUT THIS DOESN'T HAVE TO BE DONE ALL AT ONCE: You could do some in the morning at breakfast, then do the read aloud. Maybe before nap time you do the learning activity and before dinner, the easy activity. **Make this fit for you!**

This page is only a brief snapshot of what the week will look like. Each lesson is broken down in detail on the Daily Lesson's page. Make sure to notice the subject of each activity (for example: art or math).

HOW TO READ A UNIT

UNDERSTANDING THE DAILY LESSONS

Let's look more closely at a daily lesson.

OPENING: Start the day with calendar time (see "morning calendar routine" on page 22) and the song/poem for the unit

MONDAY

INTRODUCING THE TOPIC: Begin the lesson with a quick conversation to set up the learning

OPENING

Morning calendar routine
Song & Poem

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

"What is an apple?" Have a conversation with your child about apples. "What are apples? How do we get apples?"

"We are going to be learning about apples!"

READ ALOUDS:

A themed book to anchor the day

READ ALOUD

Do a picture walk through the book and first look at *pictures only*. Emphasize making predictions – "What do we think this book is about?" Read *How Do Apples Grow?* Ask your child questions about the story while you read.

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT:

More learning conversations to have

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

Start by getting a closer look at an apple. Be scientists and investigate the different parts. Talk about how apples feel, smell, and taste.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:

A meaty lesson that connects to the skill of the day and the theme

LEARNING ACTIVITY – SORTING APPLES

In this activity, your child will sort apples into groups by color.

Introduce the idea of sorting. "We are going to put these apples into color groups. This is called sorting by color."

Lay down 3 pieces of construction paper: 1 red, 1 yellow, and 1 green. This will give your child a space to sort onto. Have them sort the apples by color.

Extension: Talk about the number of apples in each group, compare amounts, discuss each group's size.

EXTENSIONS:

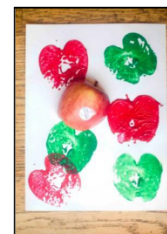
Look for extensions built throughout the program to expand concepts, increase challenge or provide additional learning.

EASY ACTIVITY – APPLE STAMPING

Today, your child will make apple prints.

Cut one apple in half. Investigate the apple with your child. *What are the parts of an apple?* Help your child identify stem, core, seeds, skin, flesh – they do not need to memorize these vocabulary words (this is just an introduction).

Dip the apple half in paint and stamp it onto a piece of white paper. Repeat as many times as your child likes. Save these apple halves for Thursday.



Apples: Unit 1, Week 1
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EASY ACTIVITY:

A simple, often independent, activity that reinforces the theme

LOOK FOR HYPERLINKS: Occasionally, I've linked to activities on my website, BusyToddler.com so you can view how the activity looked at my house.

HOW TO READ A UNIT

UNDERSTANDING THE DAILY LESSONS

A daily lesson is meant to take around 45 minutes to 1 hour. Timing will vary based on age of child, type of lessons/activity, and your daily schedule.

ROUTINE OF EACH DAY

Each day in Playing Preschool follows a predictable routine, an “order of events” that will become second nature to you.

OPENING: Each day should start with some sort of calendar routine. This provides a clear introduction to the learning day. Read more about my opening routine on page 22.

SONG/POEM: Songs and poems are so important to future reading and promoting phonemic awareness. They are also a great way to begin a day. Each unit has a simple song and a simple poem for you to learn with your child. Hang them on the fridge to help you learn the words – you’ll have them memorized in no time.

INTRODUCING OR REVIEWING THE TOPIC: Start each day by getting your child ready to learn with a little “warm up” conversation about the theme. In teaching, we call this the “anticipatory set” – how fancy does that sound?! Use it as a chance to connect the theme to your everyday life, to hear your child’s opinion about the topic, and to set the stage for the day’s learning.

READ ALOUD: The anchor of each theme is the read alouds. Books bring themes and subjects to life. Take time and go slowly through the book each day. In most units, books are read twice in a week to maximize the learning from each book. Learn more about doing a great read aloud on the page 21 “Tips for a Your Read Aloud.”

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT: This is the true teaching part of your day. Here is where you will connect the book you just read to the theme and often, to the learning activity.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES: The meaty activity. These activities typically require some teaching and help develop at least one of the skills of the day. These activities also use interaction and teamwork with parent and child “learning” together.

EASY ACTIVITIES: These are quick and easy activities that align with the theme of the unit as a fun extra way to learn and play. These activities are often independent (but supervised) and usually very open ended.

THE SKILLS

WHAT WILL YOUR CHILD LEARN?

Throughout this program, your child will be learning different skills to help them grow their education foundation. These skills are important to building background knowledge. The goal in early childhood is to give kids exposure and experience with different topics and activities.

The skills targeted in this program are open-ended. There is no moment of mastery where you move your child on to another skill (or hold them back to achieve mastery). These skills grow with a child throughout their life. On the following pages, I'll expand on these skills and how they are taught.

PREDICTING: Children demonstrate an ability to answer questions about a story and what *might* happen.

RECALL & RETELL: Children recall and retell information about a story or topic.

SORTING: Children sort and classify data, information, and objects.

NUMBER SENSE: Children demonstrate an understanding of numbers.

MEASURING: Children use measurement words to show size, height, weight, length and capacity.

SHAPES: Children identify basic 2-dimensional shapes.

ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE: Children show an awareness of letters and sounds.

WHY WERE THESE SKILLS PICKED?

As a former teacher, I have a good idea what background knowledge and information is important to kids before kindergarten. I also know that it's simply not realistic to expect kids to master everything and know everything before they begin the school years. Instead, we rely on **exposure and experiences**.

My job as a parent is to provide my kids with exposures and experiences with topics, ideas, and skills. When they sit down to sort someday in school, I want my child to have *background knowledge* on what sorting is. I don't need her to be a sorting master; I just want her to be able to unlock past experiences with sorting. "I've done this at home with my Mom!" And suddenly, she feels more confident.

These skills transcend. One of the coolest parts of this program is how these simple skills, this small list, ends up crossing subject areas. We use predicting in reading, math, and science. Recalling and retelling information is a reading, writing, and communication skill. Sorting is used in almost every subject as we sift through data. This small list is mighty and intentional.

THE SKILLS

LET'S BREAK THESE SKILLS DOWN A LITTLE MORE

Remember when I said this program was built on routine? There was a reason. By repeatedly touching on these same skills each week, the skills grow and develop within your child. An activity on number sense in Unit 1 is going to look vastly different in Unit 19. This is because we are spiraling around on these skills, building them slowly throughout the units. There is a clear sequence and progression of skills.

This also means you cannot shift the order of the units. Because the skills build, the layout of Playing Preschool has been carefully set. Changing the order disrupts the flow of learning.

PREDICTING

You'll find this skill every Monday and Wednesday as part of your read aloud. Ask your child to predict/guess what the story will be about. Then, throughout the book, have them continue to make predictions. *Asking and answering question during a story is huge for developing reading comprehension. Later, when kids learn to read, understanding what they are reading is paramount and the foundation is laid here.*

TIPS FOR TEACHING PREDICTING:

- Start with the cover of a book: "What do you think this is about?"
- Ask questions as you read: "What do you think will happen next?" "What would you do?" "If they do that, what might happen?"
- Ask questions at the end: "Were our predictions right?" "What was different?"
- Predicting is also a big part of science and math – don't limit it to reading

RECALL & RETELL

This skill is taught every Friday by asking your child to retell information from a story we read OR about the theme. As an adult, you recall and retell information all the time (like when you tell a friend about an article you read). As this skill builds, children will start to learn to retell stories in sequence.

TIPS FOR TEACHING RECALL AND RETELL:

- Ask your child to retell a book: "Can you tell me about this story?" Model it, too.
- Throughout the day, ask them to recall you what they did: "Can you tell me what happened at the park?"
- As this skill grows, start working on sequence: "What happened at the beginning? Middle? End?" Introduce words like first, next, last.

THE SKILLS

SORTING

Every Monday, your child will complete a sorting activity. Sorting is a hugely important skill for reading comprehension, science, and math skills later on. When a child sorts, they are making decisions, grouping objects by like attributes, and analyzing information. Sorting may seem simple but it is SO important and it's easy to bring it into everyday life.

TIPS FOR TEACHING SORTING:

- Try sorting in a variety ways, not just by color, but by size, shape, texture, etc.
- Sort often – *“Can you make me two groups?”*
- Ask questions – *“What’s different about the groups?”*
- Increase the challenge – try sorting by 2 variables. *“These are blue AND small.”*

ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

Each unit has 1-2 letters as the “focus letter.” On Tuesdays and Thursdays, you’ll talk about a specific letter of the alphabet with your child. You’ll first show them the letter, talk about what it looks like, and how it sounds.

Mastery is not expected. Together, you’ll take a look through the read aloud books and hunt for a specific letter. During each unit, you will search for that letter around your house: in the pantry, in your book bin, on sticky notes, with flashlights, etc. Remember mastery is not expected. This is about exposure.

Week 2 Friday is a letter review in every unit. This is our chance to spiral back and review previously learned letters. If your child didn’t totally grasp a letter during its focus week, don’t worry. They’ll keep getting exposed to it week after week.

TIPS FOR TEACHING THE ALPHABET:

- Children learn letters at their own pace. Do not drill letters, introduce them. Mastery is not expected until a child is in Kindergarten.
- Make the focus letter a part of your life. Tape it to the fridge. Talk about it at the grocery store. Integrate it, but in a playful, low stress sort of way.
- Remember that learning letters is a lot like learning animal names (and sounds). You didn’t stress or flashcard that skill – and you don’t need to here. Introduce letters and talk about them in context. When you saw a cow, you said, “That’s a cow. It says MOOO!” and your child caught on. The same will happen with letters.

If your child has already mastered letters: Alphabet knowledge continues to be taught into grade school. For kids who “know” their letter names, this becomes a chance to bring letters to life and introduce them as the building blocks of words, to see them in the home environment, and to understand how they will eventually lead to reading. This is a time to solidify letters, play with them, give additional practice, and deepen their knowledge from surface level memorizing.

THE SKILLS

NUMBER SENSE

You will teach number sense activities every Tuesday and Thursday.

Number sense is a broad term for learning about numbers and counting. That means learning to recognize numbers, counting from memory, and 1:1 correspondence (which is a fancy way of saying touching and counting/ understanding that one object is 1). It also includes understanding quantity, comparing number values, and how to join groups of numbers together.

In this program, as we build skills, number sense activities will grow in complexity throughout the “school year.” The program begins with using a five-frame to count 1 – 5 and ends the year introducing the conceptual knowledge necessary to learn addition facts. Like I said, this program BUILDS.

QUICK NOTE: These more *basic* lessons are incredibly important, even after a child has memorized counting numbers. Don’t dismiss a lesson as too easy. Kids need review, they need reteaching, and they may need instruction in an area that you *think* they have already mastered. This is also the chance to go beyond memorized learning and into building a deep relationship with numbers.

The goal is developing a conceptual understanding beyond memorizing.

TIPS FOR TEACHING NUMBER SENSE:

- Just because a child can “rote count” (that means to count from memory) doesn’t mean they fully understand that 5 means five objects or how those 5 objects can be oriented in different ways, but still be worth 5. Those are all very different skills.
- One to one correspondence is HUGE. Make sure your child is ALWAYS touching and counting when they count out a group of objects.
- Remember that numbers and counting are developmental and vary from kid to kid. Don’t get frustrated, just keep introducing. Keep things light.

MEASURING

Measurement activities will be every Wednesday. This is NOT measuring as in inches and centimeters. This is comparing and noticing size, length, height and capacity (how much can a container hold?). These lessons are important for building vocabulary, applying number sense, deepening math skills, and growing critical thinking skills.

TIPS FOR TEACHING MEASURING

- Integrate measurement vocabulary words into every day life (short, long, small, medium, large, bigger, more, less).
- Compare sizes when you can (Which box is bigger? Which toy is smaller?).
- Talk about times in your day when you are measuring or thinking about sizes.

THE SKILLS

SHAPES

Week 1 Friday always includes an activity with shapes as the focus. As children grow, they begin to recognize shapes. Learning the names of circles, squares, and triangles as well as some of their attributes (how many sides?) is a big skill. As they grow in this skill, children will learn to recognize shapes in the world around them. Shapes become a crucial part in developing a child's spatial awareness (the understanding of an object's relationship to other objects).

TIPS FOR TEACHING SHAPES:

- Keep it simple and focus on the most basic shapes: square, circle, and triangle.
- Whenever you talk about shapes, point out their attributes so your child hears this often (circles are round, squares have 4 points, etc.).
- When you see shapes "in the real world" point them out. Talk about shapes you see at the grocery store, make it a game in the car. Bring shapes into real life.
- A quick note about "diamonds": Diamonds are gems, rhombuses are shapes. If you introduce a rhombus, please don't call it a diamond.

WHAT OTHER SUBJECTS ARE TAUGHT

In addition to these skills, other subject areas are woven in throughout the program. Each unit will typically feature at least one activity from the other subject areas:

- Art (both crafts and process/open-ended art)
- Sensory (tactile learning with their hands)
- Science or STEM (science, technology, engineering and math)
- Fine motor skills (working on small movements like threading)
- Gross motor skills (working on large movements like jumping)

HOLY MOLY, THAT SOUNDS LIKE A LOT

Now that you've read through all the skills and subjects in this program, I bet it sounds like a lot. Don't worry! The beauty of open-ended learning is that it meets the child at the child's level.

Open-ended skills are where it's at. We can mold and bend skills to fit the child's developmental level. The same question or activity posed to a 4-year-old will be answered or completed differently than a 2.5-year-old.

Spiraling is the name of the game. This program spirals. That means your child will be introduced to information and then revisit a similar lesson a few weeks later, but with a little more challenge. The spiral effect is part of why we don't need to teach to mastery – they're going to hear the information again and again, with more chances to grow and learn each time.

LET'S TEACH KIDS TO THINK

Of course, we want our children to know and master, understand and share lots of information. We love when our kids can count and say the ABCs because it's tangible and quantifiable and it "shows" they are learning BUT....

**IT DOESN'T SHOW EVERYTHING.
AND IT DOESN'T SHOW THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS.**

With Playing Preschool, there are a lot of skills and concepts your child will learn throughout the program, but the most important skill can't be seen.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THEY CAN LEARN IS...

HOW TO THINK.

We want our children to be well-rounded learners. We want our children to be engaged and excited learners. They don't become these kinds of learners by sitting and answering, memorizing and taking tests.

They become this kind of learner by:

- **DOING**
- **EXPLORING**
- **INTERACTING**
- **QUESTIONING**

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE THEM "THINKERS"

We help our children grow to be great "thinkers" by constantly asking them questions. We want them to investigate the problem and look for solutions. The moment we step in and say "this is how it works" or "this is how you do it," we've lost the chance for them to think.

DON'T MISS THOSE CHANCES

Hang back and don't come to the rescue. Keep an eye on their process and ask questions to guide. "What do you think will happen...." "Why did that happen...." "I wonder what made that happen...." You'll notice this built throughout Playing Preschool – the chance for your child to investigate.