



Countdown to Kindergarten Curriculum Notebook



South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness

Dear Countdown Teacher,

Thank you for your participation in Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK). We think that you'll find that the program's benefits last well beyond the summer months.

Countdown to Kindergarten is a six-week summer home visitation program for rising five-year-old kindergartners and their families. The program is designed to:

- Establish lasting home-school bonds rooted in trust and mutual respect;
- Enable parents and teachers to reach common understandings of both familial and classroom expectations for the coming school year; and
- Establish strong student-teacher relationships that will facilitate the home-school transition and enhance classroom learning.

While the CTK curriculum entails a weekly activity drawn from academic areas, it is important to note that the primary objectives of Countdown relate less to student mastery of specific academic content, than to the learning of their parents and/or caregivers. Parents should be actively involved in each weekly visit, with teachers seizing opportunities to model approaches and strategies that - if emulated - will support their child's classroom success. Additionally, although this notebook outlines a specific weekly curriculum, we acknowledge that each family is unique and that you as the home visitor are the expert in how this curriculum should be delivered. Please feel free and encouraged to deliver this material in the way that is best for each family.

Again, please accept our thanks for your willingness to serve as a Countdown teacher this summer. We invite you to contact South Carolina First Steps or your local First Steps County Partnership if we can offer you additional support in this important role.



Dr. Dan Wuori
Deputy Director
South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness

If you have questions, please contact Janice Kilburn at jkilburn@scfiststeps.org or 803-730-3084.



Visit One: Getting to Know You

Purposes of the visit 1) to become acquainted with the child and his/her family, 2) to provide the family with an overview of the *Countdown to Kindergarten* home visitation program, 3) to engage in an interactive read-aloud with the child and family (modeling techniques and questioning strategies that the parents will be asked to use on their own), and 4) to begin the process of gathering parental/caregiver feedback that will assist you in supporting the child's academic success.

Materials

Transition Toolkit

Any enrollment paperwork that was not completed prior

Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come by Nancy Carlson

Family Commitment Form

Pre Program Family Questionnaire

Getting to Know the Family

Prior to the visit, both the child and teacher will prepare "Me Boxes," filled with items that represent their individual interests. When calling to schedule this initial visit, please ask the family to assist the child in the advance preparation of his/her "Me Box."

Overview of the Program

Share the goals of the program with the family:

- (1) To develop relationships that will assist the child as he/she transitions into the formal school setting;
- (2) To enable teachers and parents to establish mutual understanding of familial and classroom expectations that will enable the child's long-term school success - to include an introduction to South Carolina's academic standards for kindergarten.
- (3) **To increase familial involvement and strengthen the ties between home and school.**

Using the Family Commitment Form, share the anticipated schedule of the six CTK home visits and visit to the classroom. If possible, determine dates for your future visits and provide instructions on how to reach you if a family must reschedule a visit. You can write the dates and your contact information on the Family Commitment Form and leave it with the family.

Introduce the Transition Toolkit

Share the transition toolkit with the child and family. Let them know that on each visit you will be bringing materials to share that the child will be allowed to keep for his/her own use. Allow the child time to explore all the materials in the toolkit.

The materials are:

- (1) Children's books (three titles)
- (2) Art materials

- (3) Manipulatives (Unifix Cubes, Puzzle, and, Magnetic Letters)
- (4) Journal

Interactive Read-Aloud: Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come

Read Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come to the child (in the parent or caregiver's presence). Discuss child's feelings and questions about entering kindergarten. Be expressive and take opportunities to pause and connect the story to the child's own forthcoming entry to school. Ask open-ended questions designed to draw the child into the story and extend his/her expressive language.

Use the crayons and a page in the writing journal to draw a picture of something you would like to learn at school during the upcoming school year.

Take a moment upon completion to make the nature of this lesson explicit to the parent or caregiver present. For example (please use your own words):

"You might have noticed that I paused several times to ask about the story - and to talk to (child's name) about how the character's experiences are kind of like his/hers as we get ready to begin kindergarten. This is something I do a lot in class that I'd really encourage you to do as you read together every day. I try hard to ask what I call open-ended questions - which mean that there are lots of possible answers. Things like: "What do you think will happen next?" or "What was your favorite part?"

The reason these questions are important is that they help children to develop their own ideas and connect what's happening in the story to something they might understand from their own lives. It takes a little longer than just reading the story from beginning to end, but I find that it really helps the kids to understand the stories in more powerful ways."

Leave the backpack, Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come, and the art materials with the child. Explain to the child and the parent(s) that you will be using the art materials throughout the visits. Encourage the child and parent(s) to use the materials between meetings but to return and keep them in toolkit, so that they will be readily available for future visits.

Gathering Parent/Caregiver Feedback

During the first visit, please administer the Pre Program Family Questionnaire, letting the family know that their answers are anonymous but extremely important for measuring the success of CTK program. Assign each family an individual family number (no family should have the same number as another family in your caseload) and write the family number on the Pre and Post Test where instructed (please write your last name on each questionnaire, also.) This ensures that each family's survey remains anonymous, yet allows a family's Pre and Post Test changes to be evaluated. In order for this survey to be scored, numerical answers must be given for the question "How many minutes or hours per week do you read?" Answers such as "some", "a lot" etc. cannot be scored so please have the family answer the question in hours and/or minutes. An estimation is completely acceptable, as schedules can vary daily in all families.

Should time - and the appropriate opportunity - permit, this initial visit presents an outstanding opportunity for you to speak privately with the parent (perhaps as the child explores the toolkit

materials) about his/her own hopes, expectations and/or concerns relating to the kindergarten transition.

While not essential to the first visit itself (please use your discretion as to the appropriate times/places) it is important to note that developing mutual understanding is a process that will require as many opportunities for the parent to speak as to listen over the coming weeks. Several suggested questions are included below:

- I may be the teacher, but I'll never hope to know your child as well as you do. Would you tell me about him/her?
- What does he/she enjoy doing in free time at home?
- Has he/she ever attended any form of preschool?
- Does your child have any fears I should know about - including any related to coming to school for the first time?
- Have you ever had any concerns about his/her development that you think I might need to know about? (If yes, ask the parent whether these concerns have ever been brought to the attention of the child's pediatrician? Is he/she receiving any special services? Would the parent like your assistance in connecting him/her to support services that may be offered through the school district?)
- What do you as a parent hope for him/her to get out of kindergarten as a learner?

Look for opportunities to continue these discussions across the summer and throughout the school year. Remember that your own understanding of the child and family is as important to the child's successful school transition as is the family's understanding of classroom and school-wide expectations.



Weekly Activities - Visit One

1. Read a book with your child every day. Look for opportunities to pause and ask your child "open-ended" questions about the story. (Open-ended questions have many possible answers. For example: "What do you think will happen next?" or "Can you think of a time you felt scared like (the character in the book)?")
2. Use Crayons to draw a picture of your family. Sit together and label each family member by name. Talk about the letters needed to write the name of each.
3. Visit your local library with your child. If you don't have a library card you can sign up for one - they're free!
4. Review the parent handout [Television and Your Kindergartner](#).
5. Develop a list of your questions about kindergarten and the coming school year for discussion during a future visit. This list may include both your own parent questions and those of your child.



Television and Your Kindergartener

Television has a huge influence on our children. The average American spends about 4 hours per day watching television. The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend television for children younger than 2 years. After this age, parents may wish to allow their child to watch TV for short periods of time. According to most sources, about one hour of TV per day is enough. Make sure that you balance TV time with more active, interpersonal activities like reading, dancing, and singing with your child.

Too much TV can lead to:

Obesity	Poor grades	Lack of imaginative play
Inferior reading skills	Poor social skills	

Children who watch violent shows may:

- Become desensitized to violence
- Imitate the violence they see
- Identify with the victimizers or the victims
- Be more fearful of their own world
- View violence as the way to solve problems

To help you establish healthy TV habits in your home, here are some suggestions from the National Association for the Education of Young Children:

- Plan your family viewing. Give your child a choice of what to watch - within your guidelines. Set and keep reasonable limits.
- Move the TV to a room that is not at the center of family life. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents not allow a TV in their child's room.
- Offer your child fun and constructive activities like reading, outside play, and drawing. These activities will help your child's development in all areas and can distract her from wanting to watch too much TV.
- Watch TV with your child and talk about the program you view together. Explain, comment, and give your opinions about what you see.
- Discuss commercials with your child. Young children tend to believe what they see on TV and have not yet developed the ability to evaluate these manipulative messages. Point out when advertisers make false or exaggerated claims. Help your child develop critical thinking skills by your example.

Remember: You can use the TV as a tool for entertainment and education without allowing it to control your home life. Set limits on your child's viewing time and choose appropriate shows so that television enriches, but does not rule, your kindergartener's development.

Adapted from Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc., 1997



Visit Two: English Language Arts

Purpose of visit To reinforce the importance of daily reading.

Materials Chicka Chicka Boom Boom by Bill Martin Jr. & John Archambault
Magnetic Letters
Journal and Pencil
Parent Handouts

Warm-Up Activity

Begin the visit by introducing the child and parents to one or more favorite classroom songs, finger-plays or nursery rhymes. Invite all to participate in their singing or recitation.

SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy

One important purpose of this second visit is to begin introducing the parent/caregiver to the SC Learning Standards for Kindergarten - which represent the core learning expectations for the state's 5K classrooms. This visit is designed to highlight the English Language Arts and Literacy standards in particular. While teachers should be cautioned against prolonged (or jargon-y) discussion of the standards themselves, the beginning of this visit is a good time to introduce the standards as a "guide" or "roadmap" for the year.

For example (please use your own words):

"One of the things I'm going to do during these visits is share some information with you about the things we'll be learning this year in kindergarten. The state has a set of goals - we call them our "standards" - that serve as our "roadmap" for the year. These standards are what we hope your child will be able to accomplish by the end of kindergarten. Every time I come I'm going to share another section and then we'll be doing a few quick activities to illustrate how we learn these skills in the classroom. I'm going to give you copies because I think it's important for parents to know in advance all we'll be working to learn this year. My goal is the same as yours: making sure (child's name) is ready to go to first grade and shine!"

Interactive Read-Aloud: Chicka Chicka Boom Boom

This visit's content begins with an interactive read-aloud of Chicka Chicka Boom Boom. As in the initial visit, please encourage the parent/caregiver to participate and be sure to model expressive reading and appropriate questioning. Begin by connecting the text to both the child's own experiences and the visit's second activity, which will entail the use of magnetic letters.

For example (please use your own words):

"This is one of my very favorite books. It's called Chicka Chicka Boom Boom and it is about a group of letters that have a race to the top of a coconut tree. Have you ever tried to climb a tree? It can be fun,

but you have to be awfully careful don't you? I think I might be afraid to climb a tree that tall. Can you guess why? That's right...I think I'd be afraid that I might fall. You don't suppose that'll happen to these letters do you? Let's read and find out!

I bet that if you look very closely that you'll see some of the letters in your name. Do you know what letter your name starts with? Should we see if we can find it?"

Throughout the reading, model "teacher talk" stressing content that will be emphasized in your classroom. A few possibilities might include:

- Discussing the roles of authors and illustrators
- Noting the title page
- Discussing the illustrations, identifying significant letters in the child's name, your school's, or your own.
- Inviting the child to share his/her own knowledge related to the story (e.g. Have you ever seen a tree like the one in the story? There's one that looks kind of like it on the South Carolina flag. Have you ever seen it?)
- Encouraging the child and parent to join in reading the familiar "chicka chicka boom boom" refrain. As the child joins in the reading, be sure to recognize him/her for her abilities "as a reader." Find an appropriate opportunity before the end visit to explain to the parent/caregiver that this type of memorized or anticipatory "reading" is an important form of reading in its own right to be encouraged (never mocked or discouraged) as an important precursor to conventional or "real" reading.

Magnetic Letters

After reading (and re-reading as appropriate) Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, introduce the magnetic letters - which can be placed on a magnetic surface such as a refrigerator door, baking pan, cookie sheet or simply on a flat surface like a floor or table. Encourage the child and parent to work together to identify and name the letters in the child's name. Connect them from left to right to "build" the child's name and/or other simple words (use the book as a resource as appropriate).

Journal

Using the journal and a pencil, have the student write the letters of the alphabet and begin practicing how to write their name. Model for the parent how to assist the student in this activity, depending on the student's writing ability.

Parent Talk

Share and review the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy and Language Strategies for Parents handouts.

Here again is an opportunity to encourage the importance of daily reading. You may wish to inquire as to the child's favorite book(s) and ask him or her to show it/them to you.

While many parents view school as the place one "learns to read" it is important that you help parents develop an understanding of reading as a developmental process - and one that they can help to support each day by immersing their child in written and spoken language in both formal and informal ways.

Questions About Kindergarten

Before wrapping this visit, refer back to the Home Activity in which the family was asked to develop a list of their questions about kindergarten. Whether this has been developed as a formal, written list or not, it is important to spend a few minutes answering these questions (from both parent and child). Remind the family that you'll be ready to answer additional questions as a part of each subsequent visit.



Weekly Activities - Visit Two

1. Continue to read with your child daily. Some recommended alphabet books are:
ABC's by Eric Carle
Alphabet Adventure by Audrey Wood
Dr. Seuss's ABC
Alphabet Under Construction by Denise Fleming
2. Use the magnetic letters to create additional words (the name of each family member and/or that of a family pet, for example) and to practice letter recognition. See how many letters your child can name independently.
3. Review the Parent Handouts titled The Importance of Play and Language Strategies for Parents.
4. Familiarize yourself with the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, noting any questions you may have for your teacher. Remember that these are year-end expectations that will be developed in the context of daily classroom activities across a full year.
While it is possible that your child may be advancing toward (or have successfully attained) mastery of some standards already, do not be alarmed if this is not the case. Parents are not encouraged to turn the standards into a high-pressure drill. Instead, consider the many ways in which you can support and encourage their mastery within the context of daily conversation and activity.
5. Use the magnetic letters to practice making some of the sight words in the writing journal. Also practicing writing these words in the journal
6. If you have access to the internet, explore some reading websites. Some suggested ones are:
www.ABCYA.com
www.Starfall.com
www.PBSkids.com
www.storylineonline.com
www.seussville.com



The Importance of Play

What is Play?

Play is an important means by which the child develops and learns. Play is a young child's work, but is also a way of learning about things, people and places. A child's play needs to be meaningful, pleasant, and varied. From the earliest form of social games such as smiling at an adult to the more sophisticated dramatic play of the five year-old, play takes on many forms and meanings. Play gives the child a sense of power over reality. Play lets the child take on adult roles and adult language. Play builds muscles and makes them work together. Play coordinates the eye and hand. Most of all, play extends the self and helps the child develop a creative mind and a positive self-image. For young children, there is no distinction between "play" and "work", there is only **doing** - experiencing and learning. And they are intrinsically motivated to discover things about their world by interacting with people, things and ideas. When parents understand this, they will support their children's discoveries and help them take advantage of the multitude of learning experiences that occur throughout the day.

Play is the best way for our children to learn. Children who learn through play also develop social and emotional skills, which are critical for long-term success. Children need time to just be - they need time for unstructured play.

Value of Play

Some parents may express concern about the amount of time children are allowed to play. If you encounter this, you may want to remind them how much their child has already learned without any direct teaching. For example, say something like this: "Just look at all the things Lindsey learned during her first four years, long before she ever set foot in any classroom." Point out that Lindsey learned to walk, talk, sing, move to music, put most of her clothes on, use the toilet, feed herself, recognize friends and relatives, interact with other people, and so forth, all *before* she entered school.

Play:

- is the child's teacher. Play is the way young children learn to solve problems. Play is the work of children.
- allows children to express feelings, use their creativity, and expand their imaginations.
- develops small and large muscles.
- motivates the child's intellectual learning.
- allows the child opportunities to make choices and learn new skills.



Language Strategies for Parents

- **Verbally describe your actions.**
 - "I'm going to put all the white clothes in this pile, and the dark clothes in this pile."
 - "I'm writing a letter to Grandma."
- **Describe your child's actions.**
 - "I see that you are putting all the blocks on the top shelf."
 - "You are putting on your blue socks today."
- **Ask your child to describe something he did.**
 - "Tell me about your drawing."
 - "Tell me how you made this book."
- **After your child has told you something, restate and expand on what she said.**
 - "Oh, you're going to play with Brad at school tomorrow?"
 - "Yes, you really do need a band aid on your knee."
- **Ask questions requiring thinking and more than one-word responses.**
 - "What could happen if we put another block on the tall tower?"
 - "What do we need to take on our picnic?"
- **At the grocery store, on a walk, etc., talk about things you see.**
 - "I wonder how that man got up on the roof."
 - "Look at that family who has two babies in the shopping cart!"
- **Have a conversation with your child. Each person should have two or three turns to say something about the same topic.**
 - Mother: "What did you see at the zoo today?"
 - Child: "I saw some bears."
 - Mother: "Oh! Tell me what they looked like."
 - Child: "They were big and furry."
 - Mother: "What were the bears doing?"
 - Child: "Sleeping and playing on the rocks."

English Language Arts and Literacy Standards for Kindergarten

Learning new language skills is a hallmark of kindergarten. Your child will learn about the alphabet and its role in reading. Your child will practice rhyming, matching words with beginning sounds, and blending sounds into words. Practice with these types of activities is a powerful step toward learning to read and spell correctly. The size of your child's vocabulary is another key factor in his or her ability to read and comprehend books and stories. Your child also will begin to experiment with writing and will be encouraged to use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing letters to share information, ideas, and feelings.

The following is a sample of English Language Arts and Literacy Standards that your child will be working on:

- Naming upper- and lower-case letters, matching those letters with their sounds, and printing them
- Comparing the adventures and experiences of characters in familiar stories, such as fairy tales and folktales
- Retelling familiar stories and talking about stories read to them using details from the text
- Using a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to describe an event, including his or her reaction to what happened
- Stating an opinion or preference about a topic or book in writing (e.g., "My favorite book is . . .")
- Taking part in classroom conversations and following rules for discussions (e.g., learning to listen to others and taking turns when speaking)
- Speaking clearly to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas, including descriptions of familiar people, places, things, and events
- Asking and answering questions about key details in stories or other information read aloud
- Understanding and using question words (e.g. *who, what, where, when, why, how*) in discussions
- Learning to recognize, spell, and properly use those little grammatical words that hold the language together (e.g., *a, the, to, of, from, I, is, are*)

Here are some things you can do with your child to promote English Language Arts and Literacy at home:

- Read with your child every day. (Some suggested books: *Are You My Mother* by P.D. Eastman or *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss.) Ask your child to explain his or her favorite parts of the story. Share your own ideas. To find more books for your child to read, visit www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf.
- Encourage your child to tell you about his or her day at school. Keep paper, markers, or crayons around the house for your child to write letters or words or draw a picture about his or her day. Have your child describe the picture to you.
- Play word games like *I Spy*, sing songs like *Itsy Bitsy Spider*, and make silly rhymes together.



Visit Three: Math

Purpose of visit: Introducing mathematical concepts such as one-to-one correspondence, patterning, sorting, measuring, and spatial relationships and the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for Math.

Materials: Into the Tub by Laura Beaver and Jill Nolen
Unifix Cubes
Number Floor Puzzle
Parent Handouts

Warm-Up Activity

Today's visit relates to mathematics. Begin by singing or reciting a favorite math-related classroom song, poem or finger-play, such as "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe", with the child and parent(s).

One, Two, Buckle My Shoe
One, two, buckle my shoe.
Three, four, shut the door.
Five, six, pick up sticks.
Seven, eight, lay them straight.
Nine, ten, let's do it again!

Introducing the Unifix Cubes

Show the unifix cubes to the child and parent(s). Allow the child and parent to explore the cubes briefly, incorporating vocabulary around their color and shape as appropriate.

"Number Sense" and One-to-One Correspondence

After the child has had an opportunity to explore the cubes on his/her own for a brief period, begin the activity by modeling the cubes use in developing number sense and one-to-one correspondence - exploring, for example, some of the following questions:

- Can you snap together a tower that has (insert number) cubes?
- How many cubes did you use to make that tower? Let's count them together? (Model, as necessary, the need to count each cube separately - touching each with a finger to demonstrate the activity).
- Have the teacher make a tower and then ask the student to make one that is shorter or taller.

Take a moment to explain to the parent/caregiver that developing a "number sense" (strengthening the connection between the word "three" and the corresponding presence of three objects) is an important

foundational concept - one of much greater mathematical significance, for example, than the ability to count aloud by rote. Encourage him/her to look for everyday opportunities to reinforce the development of this concept. (For example, asking the child to place four apples in a bag at the grocery store.)

Patterning

After exploring number sense for a short time, ask the child if he/she is familiar with patterns, explaining (as necessary) that a pattern repeats itself in a consistent way over and over. Model the creation of a simple A-B pattern using two cube colors (e.g. red, blue, red, blue). Ask the child to extend your example or to create his/her own.

Spend a few minutes exploring patterns of increasing complexity as appropriate. (For example, A-A-B or A-A-B-B.) Challenge the child and parent/caregiver to think aloud about other places patterns occur. For example, chances are good that at least one of you will be wearing some form of patterned clothing. Take a moment to discuss the pattern - or to look around the room for other examples.

After making a pattern with the unifix cubes, help the student use the construction paper and cut small pieces to glue into their journal to recreate the pattern.

Spatial Relationships

Finally, take the opportunity to introduce one final game. Explain that you're going to ask the child to listen to your words and move the cubes accordingly. Practice with a variety of spatial relationships. For example:

- Can you put the red cube on top of the blue cube?
- Can you put the white cube beneath the black cube?
- Can you put the blue cube next to/beside the red cube?
- Can you attach three red cubes under a blue cube?

Explore your own examples as appropriate. Take a moment to explain to the parent/caregiver the importance you will be placing upon this type of vocabulary and conceptual development in the classroom.

Measurement

Using the unifix cubes, demonstrate and discuss nonstandard measurement. Show the student how to take an object, such as a spoon or pencil, and measure it using the unifix cubes. Ask the child to use the unifix cubes to measure the pencil, crayon, or scissors in their toolkit.

Number Puzzle

Clean up the unifix cubes and introduce the number puzzle to the child and parent. Spread out the pieces, each facing upward and guide the child and parent in its joint assembly, assisting as necessary.

As you work to assemble the puzzle, incorporate important vocabulary and asking the child to identify (for example):

- Labels - Fish, Panda Bears, Zebras, Flowers, Leaves, Balloons, Eggs, Crayons,
 - Giraffes, Palm Trees, Pumpkins, Dice, Butterflies, Swans, Screws, Clouds,

- Ants, Chocolate Chip Cookies, Fireworks, Birds
- Colors - Red, Blue, Yellow, Green, Purple, Orange, Black, White
- Numbers - 1-20, Number Words, Least, Most
- Words that classify - Food, Animals, Toys, Tools

Take a moment to explain your intent in doing so ("You probably notice I'm asking a lot of questions. In kindergarten we really work hard on vocabulary development - both in terms of understanding new words that are being introduced and pushing the children to use lots of words themselves. Not only does math have some of its own special vocabulary - but this is a really important part of learning to read. So as you go through the day I always encourage parents to do a lot of talking and questioning. This doesn't have to be turned into a quiz. Just look for opportunities to introduce new words - like, "Have you ever seen one of those before? That's called a XXX and it's used to XXX.")

Before disassembling the puzzle, take the opportunity to count together - encouraging the child to point to each number as you say its name aloud. If time permits, ask the child to take the puzzle apart and see if he/she can reassemble it on his/her own.

Parent Talk

Introduce the book, Into the Tub, and encourage the parents to make bath time, math time! Using household containers (small pots, plastic bowls, measuring cups, deli containers) in the tub can help the parent and child explore "empty" and "full" and compare volumes. Also point out the different reading techniques (directions are at the back of the book) that parents can use when reading the book.

Before concluding today's visit, highlight the handout describing the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for Math. Take a few moments to solicit and answer questions from the child or parent.



Weekly Activities - Visit Three

1. Continue to read with your child daily.
2. Use the Unifix cubes (or other materials) to create additional patterns and to practice counting objects. As your child counts, encourage him/her to use a finger to touch each object (as necessary) to reinforce the idea that for each number we name there must also be a matching object. Keep a watchful eye to ensure that each object is counted once, but only once.
3. Assemble the number puzzle together, asking your child to join you in naming each number aloud.
4. Review and try some of the activities included in the Parent Handouts titled: Number Sense and Patterning Games.
5. Familiarize yourself with the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for Math, noting any questions you may have for your teacher. As you read, give thought to daily occurrences during which you may be able to incorporate their practice and development - recognizing as always that these are year-end expectations.

Math Standards for Kindergarten

Young children arrive in kindergarten with widely varying knowledge in math. By the end of the year, your child must have some important foundations in place. One of the most important skills your child should develop is the ability to add and subtract small numbers and use addition and subtraction to solve word problems. This will rely on gaining some fundamentals early in the year, such as counting objects to tell how many there are. Addition and subtraction will continue to be a very strong focus in math through 2nd grade.

The following is a sample of Math Learning Standards that your child will be working on:

- Counting objects to tell how many there are
- Comparing two groups of objects to tell which group, if either, has more; comparing two written numbers to tell which is greater
- Acting out addition and subtraction word problems and drawing diagrams to represent them
- Adding with a sum of 10 or less; subtracting from a number of 10 or less; and solving addition and subtraction word problems
- Adding and subtracting very small numbers quickly and accurately (e.g., $3 + 1$)
- Correctly naming shapes regardless of orientation or size (e.g., a square oriented as a "diamond" is still a square)

Here are some things you can do with your child to promote Math at home:

Look for "word problems" in real life. Some kindergarten examples might include:

- Play "Write the next number." You write a number, and your child writes the next number.
- Ask your child questions that require counting as many as 20 things. For example, ask, "How many books do you have about wild animals?"
- Ask your child questions that require comparing numbers. "Who is wearing more bracelets, you or your sister?" (Your child might use matching or counting to find the answer.)



Number Sense

Many young children count aloud (from memory) without fully understanding that each spoken number represents a matching quantity. Developing this "number sense" is an important foundation upon which all future mathematics is based.

Developmentally, preschoolers make many common errors as they form these number concepts. At first, they rely on appearances as they compare amounts. For example, they may say three big cars are more than four smaller cars. Or they may insist a cookie broken into two pieces is now more than a whole cookie. When counting, they may skip objects or count the same object twice. As they use number concepts for their own purposes, children will gradually make fewer errors.

Same ways to help:

- Don't overemphasize "rote" or memorized counting (counting aloud to 20 or 50, for example) at the expense of developing a strong "number sense." At this point, the ability to connect the word "seven" (or even "twenty") to a set of seven (or twenty) corresponding objects, for example, is of far greater conceptual value.
- Allow your child to learn by doing. Give him chances to divide objects into groups. This could be dividing blocks to share with a friend or dividing a package of cookies to share with a brother/sister. Ask him/her to set the table - counting out just enough plates, forks, cups and napkins so that everyone coming to dinner will have one of each.
- Encourage your child to compare the number of items in two sets by matching them up one-to-one. ("Which number is bigger - seven or nine? Let's count out two sets of cubes and find out.")
- Visit the library. Some suggested "number sense" books include:

Feast for 10 by C. Falwell
Five Little Ducks by P. Paparone
Gray Rabbit's 1, 2, 3 by A. Baker
Number One, Number Fun by K. Charao
One Gorilla by A. Morozumi
One Cow Moo Moo! by D. Bennett & A. Cooke
Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed by E. Christelow
Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree by E. Christelow

- Explore the internet for math websites. Two suggested ones are:
www.ABCYA.com
www.coolmath.com



Patterning Games

Patterns are all around us. Here are some things you can do to help your child recognize and create his or her own patterns.

1. Go on a "pattern hunt" with your child. Look for patterns (in fabric, wallpaper, plates, etc.).
2. Make different patterns using common household objects (forks and spoons, Legos, paperclips, etc.) Encourage your child to make her own pattern using socks and then try to guess the pattern.
3. Go to the library with your child and look for some of the books emphasizing patterns. Suggested titles include:

The Bag I Am Taking to Grandma's by S. Neitzel
The Grouchy Ladybug by E. Carle
The House That Jack Built by C. and J. Hawkins
I Know an Old Lady by B. Karas
Lots and Lots of Zebra Stripes: Patterns in Nature by S. Swinburne
The "M&M's" Brand Color Pattern Book by B. McGrath
The Napping House by A. Wood
Nature's Paintbrush: The Patterns and Colors Around You by S. Stockdale
Pattern (Math Counts) by H. Pluckrose
Pattern Bugs by T. Harris and A. Green
Pattern Fish by T. Harris and A. Green
Patterns by C. Hammersmith
Patterns (Math Links) by P. Patilla
The Quilt Story by T. Johnston and T. DePaola
Spotted Yellow Frogs by M. Van Fleet
The Three Bears by P. Galdone
Twizzlers: Shapes and Patterns by J. Pallotta
Zoe's Hats: A Book of Colors and Patterns by S. Holm



Visit Four: Science

Purpose of visit The purpose of this visit is to introduce the scientific concepts of observation and inquiry and the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for Science.

Materials Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin Jr.
National Geographic: Frogs by Elizabeth Carney
Magnifying Glass
Parent Handouts

Warm-Up Activity Begin as always with a favorite song, poem or finger play from your classroom. Because today's activity will entail looking closely (with a magnifying glass) to gain new a new perspective on small things, one suggested possibility is Five Speckled Frogs (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fF32P24IUCA>). Introduce and read the book, National Geographic: Frogs. Point out the exciting world of frogs using the vivid photographs - from the tiny microfrog to the goliath frog that is as big as a rabbit!

Five Little Speckled Frogs (Hold five fingers (frogs) on top of your other arm (log))
Sat on a speckled log
Eating the most delicious bugs. Yum! Yum!
One jumped into the pool (jump a finger off the log into the pool)
Where it was nice and cool
Now there are Four green speckled frogs (Hold up four fingers)

Four Little Speckled Frogs (Hold four fingers (frogs) on top of your other arm (log))
Sat on a speckled log
Eating the most delicious bugs. Yum! Yum!
One jumped into the pool (jump a finger off the log into the pool)
Where it was nice and cool
Now there are Three green speckled frogs

Three little speckled frogs (Hold three fingers (frogs) on top of your other arm (log))
Sat on a speckled log
Eating the most delicious bugs. Yum! Yum!
One jumped into the pool (jump a finger off the log into the pool)
Where it was nice and cool
Now there are Two green speckled frogs

Two little speckled frogs (Hold two fingers (frogs) on top of your other arm (log))
Sat on a speckled log
Eating the most delicious bugs. Yum! Yum!
One jumped into the pool (jump a finger off the log into the pool)
Where it was nice and cool

Now there is one green speckled frog

One little speckled frog (*Hold one fingers (frogs) on top of your other arm (log)*)
Sat on a speckled log
Eating the most delicious bugs. Yum! Yum!
It jumped into the pool (*jump a finger off the log into the pool*)
Where it was nice and cool
Now there is no more speckled frogs

Interactive Read Aloud: Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?

Today's activities are designed around the science process skill of observation - one important emphasis within South Carolina's 5K science standards. Accordingly, introduce the visit as focused on "looking closely." Suggested language is included below. As always, use your own words.

"One of the things we'll do in kindergarten is learn to think like scientists. Do you know what a scientist is? (Solicit child's responses.) That's right...a scientist is someone who is curious - a person who has lots of questions and works to find the answers. There are lots of different kinds of scientists. There are scientists who learn about animals. There are scientists who learn about rocks, and space, and bugs.

One of the things that scientists all do is get to know the things they want to learn more about. They call that "observation." When you observe something you use your senses to learn as much as you can. You look with your eyes and listen with your ears. You touch with your fingers and smell with your nose - and if it's safe to do so maybe you even taste this thing!

Today we're going to talk about one part of observation: Looking closely. So I thought we'd start today with a book about looking! You might have even heard it before. It's called Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? (Note: Brown Bear is written by Bill Martin Jr., the author of Chicka, Chicka Boom Boom. You may wish to take a moment to note the role of the author and Martin's authorship of both books.)"

Read Brown Bear interactively with the child and parent. Be sure to incorporate the child's own "reading" of this predictable, repetitive text.

Looking Closely with Magnifying Glasses

After the reading, connect the text to the idea of looking/seeing and introduce the magnifying glass. Suggested language follows:

"We sure did see a lot of animals in that book, didn't we? Seeing is very important to scientists, because one thing they're always trying to do is look very closely at the things they're studying. Sometimes those things can be very small - and so scientists sometimes use special tools to help them look closely at things they can't always see too well with just their eyes.

Have you ever seen one of these before? It's called a magnifying glass. When something is "magnified" it means that it looks bigger so that we can see it more closely. Today I thought we might go on a "looking hunt" and use the magnifying glass to see if we can find some things that we've never noticed before."

Decide as the situation warrants whether your hunt is best conducted indoors or out. In either case there are many opportunities to explore the otherwise "unseen." (In fact some of these don't even entail your movement. You may wish to begin right where you are - looking, for example, at the lines of your fingerprints, hair follicles on your arm, the individual threads which make up your garments, etc.) Take several minutes to explore together with the child, questioning and noting your own observations throughout. As you go, model questioning techniques and expansive, vocabulary-building "teacher talk" for the parents, who should be with you as usual.

For example, "Hey, look at what I've discovered! I'm noticing that this rock is covered with tiny flecks of something shiny. Look, when you turn the rock back and forth they kind of twinkle in the sunlight. Do you see them? What do you suppose they might be?"

If time permits, finish your hunt by sitting together and drawing/labeling pictures of some of the things you saw. Look for opportunities throughout to connect the child's activities to those of scientists, incorporating specific vocabulary around "observation" and "looking closely." Take a few moments as you go to note some of the science-related activities you anticipate incorporating across the coming year.

Parent Talk

Take a few moments to review the [SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for Science](#). Take the opportunity to note that science presents a special opportunity for the young children with whom you work (because of their natural curiosity and wonder) and encourage the parent(s') to support their child's own exploration of meaningful questions.

Parents can play an important role in nurturing their child's own natural sense of wonder - not to mention their literacy and other forms of academic learning - through their consistent and active support of these interests. Suggest, for example, that they support these expressions of curiosity with visits to the library, internet searches, etc.

Don't Leave Just Yet...

Before you go, take this regular opportunity to explore whether the parent has any new questions or concerns. While this portion of the Countdown to Kindergarten experience is highly personal and will vary from individual to individual, remain mindful that the development of respectful, two-way communication is one of the program's primary goals.

You are visiting with the goal of learning as much- or more - from the family as they are from you. As such, it is critical that you be on the lookout for opportunities to solicit meaningful conversation with both the child and parent(s). Ultimately it is your deep knowledge of each student that will pay Countdown's greatest long-term dividends.



Weekly Activities - Visit Four

1. Continue to read with your child daily.
2. Use your magnifying glass to continue exploring your home and outdoor surroundings.
3. Have a follow up discussion with your child about how scientists are people who want to learn more about something that interests them. Ask your child to consider what he might like to study if he/her was to become a scientist. Visit the local public library or do an online search with your child to learn more about a topic that he or she would like to learn more about.
4. Review the Parent Handout titled: The Importance of Sleep.
5. Familiarize yourself with the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for Science, noting any questions you may have for your teacher. As you read, give thought to daily occurrences during which you may be able to incorporate their practice and development - recognizing as always that these are year-end expectations.

Science Learning Standards for Kindergarten

Students should be able to:

Inquiry and Process Skills

- Identify observed objects or events by using the senses
- Use tools (including magnifiers and eyedroppers) safely, accurately, and appropriately
- Predict and explain information or events based on observation or previous experience
- Compare objects by using nonstandard units of measurement
- Use appropriate safety procedures when conducting investigations

Characteristics of Organisms

- Recognize what organisms need to stay alive (including air, water, food, and shelter)
- Identify examples of organisms and nonliving things
- Match parents with their offspring to show that plants and animals closely resemble their parents
- Compare individual examples of a particular type of plant or animal to determine that there are differences among individuals
- Recognize that all organisms go through stages of growth and change called life cycles

My Body

- Identify the distinct structures in the human body that are for walking, holding, touching, seeing, smelling, hearing, talking, and tasting
- Identify the functions of the sensory organs (including the eyes, nose, ears, tongue, and skin)

Seasonal Changes

- Identify weather changes that occur from day-to-day
- Compare the weather patterns that occur from season to season
- Summarize ways that the seasons affect plants and animals

Exploring Matter

- Classify objects by observable properties (including size, shape, magnetic attraction, heaviness, texture, and the ability to float in water)
- Compare the properties of different types of materials (including wood, plastic, metal, cloth, and paper) from which objects are made

Activities Have your child:

- Cut pieces of fabric, cork, paper and other such items into similar shapes. With eyes closed, try to identify the different materials based on touch
- Collect leaves and sort them by size, shape, color, and texture. Have your child invent a way to measure the size using an object other than a ruler such as his hand.
- Go to a zoo and ask your child to predict what animals in the same section of the zoo have in common
- Track the weather for several days in a row and ask your child to try to predict the next day's weather. Ask him/her to tell you why he/she predicted what would happen.
- Discover what objects will stick to a kitchen magnet
- Identify an object by the type of material from which it is made (wood, plastic, metal, cloth, or paper)

Books:

- Aliki - *My Five Senses*
Aliki - *My Visit to the Zoo*
Fowler, Allan - *What Magnets Can Do*
Gibbons, Gail - *Seasons of Arnold's Apple Tree*
Hall, Zoe - *The Surprise Garden*
Hickman, Pamela - *A Seed Grows*
Kingfisher Publishing - *Animal Babies on the Farm*

Websites:

- AAAS Science Netlinks - www.sciencenetlinks.com
National Wildlife Federation - www.nwf.org/kids



The Importance of Sleep

How Much Sleep Does My Child Need?

At age 5, some children still need a daytime nap to recharge their batteries, but most have learned to pace themselves throughout the day and sleep longer at night. As at every stage of childhood, it's best to keep to a routine without being rigid. In other words, if your child is tired or irritable during the day or wants to nap, let him do so. By the time they enter kindergarten most children need **10 to 12 hours** of sleep daily.

After a day of non-stop activities at school, the average 5-year-old is tired. Even if she resists the idea of going to sleep, it's a good idea to get her ready by giving her a bath and changing her into sleepwear for a quiet time—playing a board game, reading a story, or just talking over the events of the day—so that when the eyelids droop, it's only a step into the bed.

The Problem with Not Getting Enough Sleep

Children who chronically fail to get enough sleep do not learn as well as better-rested youngsters. They also have a higher rate of behavior problems. In many cases, overtired children resort to hyperactivity and difficult behavior as a way of fighting off daytime drowsiness.

Is My Child Getting Enough Sleep?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, it may be time to bring the problem to your pediatrician's attention:

- Is my child difficult to wake up most mornings?
- Is my child lacking in energy?
- Does my child refuse meals because he's too tired to eat?
- Does my child have difficulty settling to sleep because she is over stimulated?
- Is my child often irritable or cranky at about the same time of the day?
- Are our family's nights disturbed because of our child's nighttime waking?

Additional Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics Guide to Your Child's Sleep, George J. Cohen, M.D., Editor
Sleepless in America - Is Your Child Misbehaving or Missing Sleep? Mary Sheedy Kurcinka



Visit Five: Social Studies and Writing

Purpose of visit: The purposes of this visit are to provide an introduction to the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for Social Studies (with a specific focus on community rules) and to reinforce the importance of daily writing.

Materials: Journals
Parent Handouts

Warm-Up Activity: As always, begin the visit with a favorite classroom song, poem, or finger play. Because today's visit will focus upon the importance of rules as both an SC Social Studies curriculum standard and kindergarten transition concept, you may wish to choose a song focused upon friendship (or rules) such as *The More We Get Together*.

The More We Get Together
The more we get together, together, together...
The more we get together the happier we'll be.
For your friends are my friends and my friends are your friends,
The more we get together the happier we'll be!

Rules: One key focus of the SC Social Studies Standards for Kindergarten is an introduction to the concepts of rules, laws and the consequences for breaking them. This is also an ideal topic of conversation as we prepare for the child's transition into kindergarten. Today's visit is designed to combine this key Social Studies content with a parental introduction to emergent writing.

Introduce the topic and the journal using your own words. Suggested language is included below:

"You know, one of the things that we always spend some time talking about in our class at the beginning of the year is our classroom rules. Do you know what a rule is? (Solicit child's answers.) That's right. A rule is a way of doing something that we decide is the right way to do it. There are rules in our school just like I bet there are rules in your family, right? There are even rules that everyone in South Carolina has to follow - we call those rules "laws," right?

When I get in my car I'm not allowed to go as fast as I want, am I? There are rules about how fast drivers can go in different areas. And we've decided on those rules in a way that tries to keep everyone safe. We can drive fast on a highway where only cars go - but we have to drive a little bit slower (or maybe even a lot slower) in places where there might be children playing near the street. Rules are very important.

So today I thought we'd talk a little bit about the rules in our class, and maybe make a list of them in your journal. Do you like to write? Maybe we could write them together?"

Proceed with a conversation about important classroom or school-wide rules, making a list of several in the journal. Communicate the expectation that (at least primarily) THE CHILD will be doing the writing. This is an important lesson to communicate to both parent and child from the beginning of your contact - and an opportunity to help make parents aware of the developmental nature of writing, which progresses gradually toward a conventional (or "correct") form. Take this opportunity to explain briefly to the parent the importance of honoring the child's early attempts at writing - even those which initially look like little more than scribbling.

Talk through the basic rules of your classroom and negotiate the manner in which they will be recorded in the journal, depending on the child's own developmental progress. If he/she is already comfortable with certain letters/sounds then (by all means) encourage the use of his/her transitional/phonetic spellings. If he or she is more comfortable drawing pictures of the rules you discuss - or even making scribble-like marks which you may subsequently wish to help label, this is perfectly acceptable as well.

The idea is to communicate one central point: Writing is a form of communicating meaning with print.

Parent Talk

Take the opportunity before wrapping for the day to talk with the parent about the developmental nature of literacy development. Just as children gradually learn to read, so too do they mature into conventional writing. You may wish to directly incorporate review of the Parent Handout titled Developmental Stages of Writing, noting that emergent writing typically follows a predictable pattern as children develop both knowledge of the printed word and the fine motor skills required to reproduce it in its conventional or "grown-up" form.

Stress the importance of encouraging the child's early efforts to communicate meaning via print - and of never dismissing it as anything less than "real writing."

Remind parents to look for meaningful reasons to involve their children in daily writing (letters to grandparents, refrigerator signs, labels, grocery lists, etc.).

As always, take a few moments to answer any new questions that the child or his/her family may have.



Weekly Activities - Visit Five

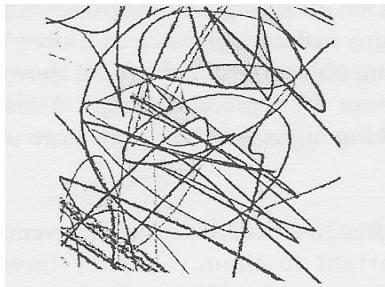
1. Continue to read with your child daily.
2. Spend some time writing with your child in the journal each day. Remember that writing is a developmental process in which your child will gradually progress from using scribble-like marks and/or simple pictures to increasingly conventional or "correct" forms. Honor what your child can do now - never dismissing it as less than "real writing" - while providing many opportunities to help him/her communicate through print. You'll be amazed at the progress you'll see in this area over the next twelve months!
3. Review the Parent Handouts titled: Developmental Stages of Writing and Ways Parents Can Encourage Writing.
5. Familiarize yourself with the SC Kindergarten Learning Standards for Social Studies, noting any questions you may have for your teacher. As you read, give thought to daily occurrences during which you may be able to incorporate their practice and development - recognizing as always that these are year-end expectations.



Developmental Stages of Writing

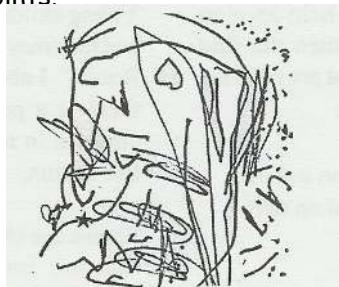
Scribble Stage

Scribbles are lines and circles starting any place on the page.



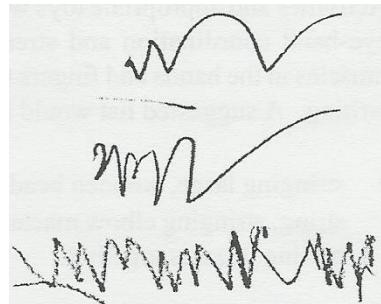
Separated Scribbles

Scribbles separate as child moves pencil to many starting points.



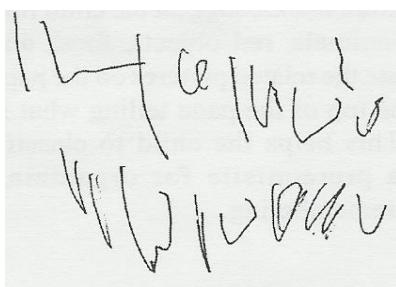
Left to Right Scribbles

Child moves pencil across the page from left to right.



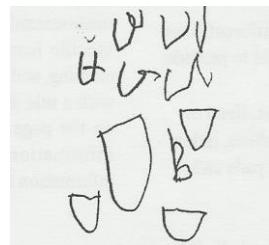
Scribble/Mock Writing

Scribbles resemble writing with no identifiable letters.



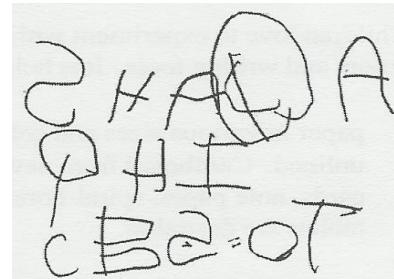
First Letters

Some scribbles resemble actual letters.



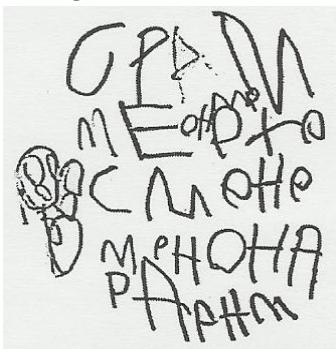
Transition Stage

First attempts to make specific letters.



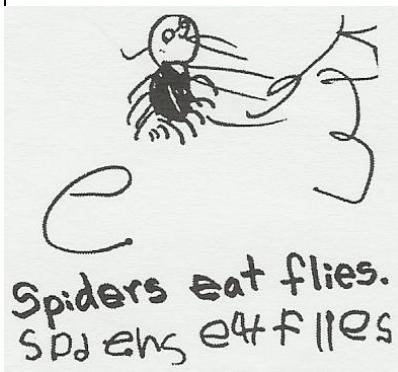
Strings of Letters

Child writes letters without forming words.



Copies Print

Child interested in writing real words and attempts copying.



Conventional Writing

Child writes real words and is interested in spelling.



Social Studies Standards for Kindergarten

Foundations of Social Studies: Children as Citizens

Students should be able to:

Identify the location of his or her home, school, neighborhood, and city or town on a map

Illustrate the features of his or her home, school, and neighborhood by creating maps, models and drawings

Identify his or her personal connections to places, including home, school, neighborhood, and city and or town

Recognize natural features of his or her environment, e.g., mountains and bodies of water

Explain the purpose of rules and laws and the consequences of breaking them

Summarize the roles of authority figures in a child's life, including those of parents and teachers

Identify authority figures in the school and community who enforce rules and laws that keep people safe, including crossing guards, bus drivers, fire fighters, and police officers

Explain how following rules and obeying authority figures reflect qualities of good citizenship, including honesty, responsibility, respect, fairness, and patriotism

Recognize the importance of symbols of the United States that represent its democratic values, including the American flag, the bald eagle, the Statue of Liberty, the Pledge of Allegiance, and "The Star-Spangled Banner"

Identify the reasons for celebrating national holidays, including Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day

Describe the actions of important figures that reflect the values of American democracy, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Compare the daily lives of children and their families in the past and present

Explain how changes in types of transportation and communication have affected the way families live and work together

Recognize the ways community businesses have provided goods and services for families in the past and do so in the present

Recognize that families of the past have made choices to fulfill their wants and needs and that families do so in the present

Activities Have your child:

- Identify your city on a local map
- Point out geographic features in his/her community, such as lakes or mountains, that make it unique
- Participate in a family game night. Help your child learn to follow the rules of the game, including taking turns. Discuss why following the rules makes the game fun for everyone
- Point out people in the community who should keep him/her safe, such as the school crossing guard, police officer or teacher
- During different activities point out American symbols of democracy such as the United States flag, the bald eagle, patriotic songs, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Discuss the significance of these symbols
- Visit with older members of the family and discuss the ways life was different in the past
- Identify some goods and services provided by local businesses
- Volunteer to pick up litter or do something else that helps the community or school. Talk about how this demonstrates good citizenship
- Read the Pledge of Allegiance to your child and discuss what each part means



Social Studies Books and Websites

Books:

- Barnes, Peter and Cheryl - *Woodrow, the White House Mouse*
Barnes, Peter and Cheryl - *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*
Barnes, Peter and Cheryl - *Marshal, the Courthouse Mouse*
Barnes, Peter and Cheryl - *Woodrow for President*
Brisson, Pat - *Benny's Pennies*
Hall, Donald - *The Ox Cart Man*
Halliman, P.K. - *For the Love of the Earth*
Hoban, Tana - *I Read Symbols*
Hoberman, Mary Ann - *A House is a House for Me*
Hudson, Cheryl W. and Bernette G. Ford - *Bright Eyes, Brown Skin*
Kennan, Shelia - *O Say Can You See? America's Symbols, Landmarks, and Important Words*
Leedy, Loreen - *Mapping Penny's World*
Leedy, Loreen - *Who's Who in My Family?*
Penner, Lucille Recht - *The Statue of Liberty*
Parish, Peggy - *Amelia Bedelia's Family Album*

Web Sites:

- Children's Books - www.cbcbooks.org
National Geographic - www.nationalgeographic.com
Public Broadcast System (PBS) - www.pbs.org
Primary Games - www.primarygames.com
United States Mint - www.usmint.gov
Weekly Reader - www.weeklyreader.com
History of the American Flag -
www.usflag.org/history/pledgeofallegiance.html
Lessons for Teaching Citizenship -
www.goodcharacter.com/pp/citizenship.html



Ways Parents Can Encourage Writing

Activities and appropriate toys will help develop hand-eye coordination and strengthen the fine muscles in the hands and fingers that are used for writing. A suggested list would be:

- Stringing large, wooden beads on a shoestring; stringing elbow macaroni on twine; putting puzzles together.
- Modeling clay and finger paint are good examples of materials that help develop these muscles.

Children love to experiment with different sizes, colors and writing tools. It is helpful to provide:

- Paper in various sizes and colors, lined or unlined. Cardboard from new shirts, index cards, note paper, spiral-bound pads and tablets.
- Large and small pencils, crayons, chalk, felt-tip and ballpoint pens, non-toxic markers, finger paints, watercolors, and tempera paints with brushes.

Young children have a strong sense of ownership and they may enjoy making signs such as "Bobby's Room." Labeling objects within the room shows there is a purpose for legible writing. Assist children in making signs for their play store or fire station.

Encourage children to dictate stories about events that are important to them. If they have participated in the event, it will be easier for them to dictate a story. Also, help your child make a picture book. Allow the child to select any picture that interests him. After the child has made several picture books, suggest the child find specific items - animals, red objects, food, and clothing - and paste the related pictures on the page with a title at the top of the page telling what is on the page. This helps the child to classify information - a prerequisite for organizing information for remembering.



Visit Six: Field Trip to Kindergarten

Purpose of visit: The purpose of this visit is to familiarize the child and the parent(s) with the kindergarten classroom itself.

Materials: Kindergarten classroom
Handout
Post Program Family Questionnaire

Classroom Visit: This sixth and final Countdown visit is a special culminating visit to the classroom itself (and may be done as a CTK group activity designed to provide an introduction to new friends as well). While this visit is obviously one that will vary from teacher to teacher, it is suggested that you spend some time walking the students and parents through the daily schedule and permit some time for free exploration within learning centers.

If possible, you are encouraged to provide a brief tour of the school itself and arrange for the parents to be personally introduced to school administrators. Because forming long-term connections between the home and school is an important Countdown Goal, incorporating information about volunteer opportunities and the school P.T.O. are both strongly encouraged. You may wish to investigate having a PTO officer present to greet the parents - perhaps even providing each CTK a complimentary membership.

Parent Talk

Share the Parent Handout titled: 10 Signs of a Good Kindergarten Classroom handout with the parents. Allow ample time for parent questions.

Administer the Post Program Family Questionnaire. Please ensure that the assigned family number coordinates with the Pre Program Questionnaire.

Top Ten Signs of a Good Kindergarten Classroom

Kindergarten is a time for children to expand their love of learning, their general knowledge, their ability to get along with others, and their interest in reaching out to the world. While kindergarten marks an important transition from preschool to the primary grades, it is important that children still get to be children -- getting kindergarteners ready for elementary school does not mean substituting academics for play time, forcing children to master first grade "skills," or relying on standardized tests to assess children's success.

Kindergarten "curriculum" actually includes such events as snack time, recess, and individual and group activities in addition to those activities we think of as traditionally educational. Developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms encourage the growth of children's self-esteem, their cultural identities, their independence and their individual strengths. Kindergarten children will continue to develop control of their own behavior through the guidance and support of warm, caring adults. At this stage, children are already eager to learn and possess an innate curiosity. Teachers with a strong background in early childhood education and child development can best provide for children what they need to grow physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Here are 10 signs of a good kindergarten classroom:

1. Children are playing and working with materials or other children. They are not aimlessly wandering or forced to sit quietly for long periods of time.
2. Children have access to various activities throughout the day, such as block building, pretend play, picture books, paints and other art materials, and table toys such as legos, pegboards, and puzzles. Children are not all doing the same things at the same time.
3. Teachers work with individual children, small groups, and the whole group at different times during the day. They do not spend time only with the entire group.
4. The classroom is decorated with children's original artwork, their own writing with invented spelling, and dictated stories.
5. Children learn numbers and the alphabet in the context of their everyday experiences. Exploring the natural world of plants and animals, cooking, taking attendance, and serving snack are all meaningful activities to children.
6. Children work on projects and have long periods of time (at least one hour) to play and explore. Filling out worksheets should not be their primary activity.
7. Children have an opportunity to play outside every day that weather permits. This play is never sacrificed for more instructional time.
8. Teachers read books to children throughout the day, not just at group story time.
9. Curriculum is adapted for those who are ahead as well as those who need additional help. Because children differ in experiences and background, they do not learn the same things at the same time in the same way.
10. Children and their parents look forward to school. Parents feel safe sending their child to kindergarten. Children are happy; they are not crying or regularly sick.

Individual kindergarten classrooms will vary, and curriculum will vary according to the interests and backgrounds of the children. But all developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms will have one thing in common: the focus will be on the development of the child as a whole.