

Me, My School and I Topic Reception

How to set yourself up for a good year!

**Creative ideas to support
your thinking, planning
and knowledge**

Rachel Jacobs



“A Focus on Essential Vocabulary, Independence & Exemplary Provision”

Contents & Introduction

This document is part of a set of FREE topic based resources that I have produced in response to requests for creative ideas to support teachers' delivery of themes. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Vanquis Bank for their support to make this happen.

For a general introduction to our planning materials and how to use them, please refer to our General Introduction document that can be found in the [Resource Hub](#) at [leadingchildren.com](#)

Whether you are dipping in and out for the odd idea here and there, or using the whole document, our materials are there to support your thinking, planning and knowledge.

You will find a spider diagram that outlines my initial thinking in terms of what could be covered by the topic. I have then selected a few areas of potential study to plan in detail.

It is imperative, even when we teach very young children, that we have a plethora of knowledge and resource to share with them, so I have included some essential background information and key vocabulary on the topic.

There are then ideas and suggestions for continuous provision (indoor and outdoor).

Numerous Talking/Reading/Writing opportunities have also been included.

It is not intended that this document is printed. We suggest you cut and paste any of the ideas you like into your own planning.

Contents

Brainstorm of Topic Areas	3
Teacher Knowledge & Background Information	5
Word Lists	9
Indoor Classroom Plan for Continuous Provision	17
Outdoor Classroom Plan for Continuous Provision	26
Talk, Reading & Writing Ideas	31
Appendix A - Making Small World Work For You	36
Appendix B - Potential Curriculum Coverage	40

Rachel Jacobs
Education Consultant
Leading Children Ltd

www.leadingchildren.com

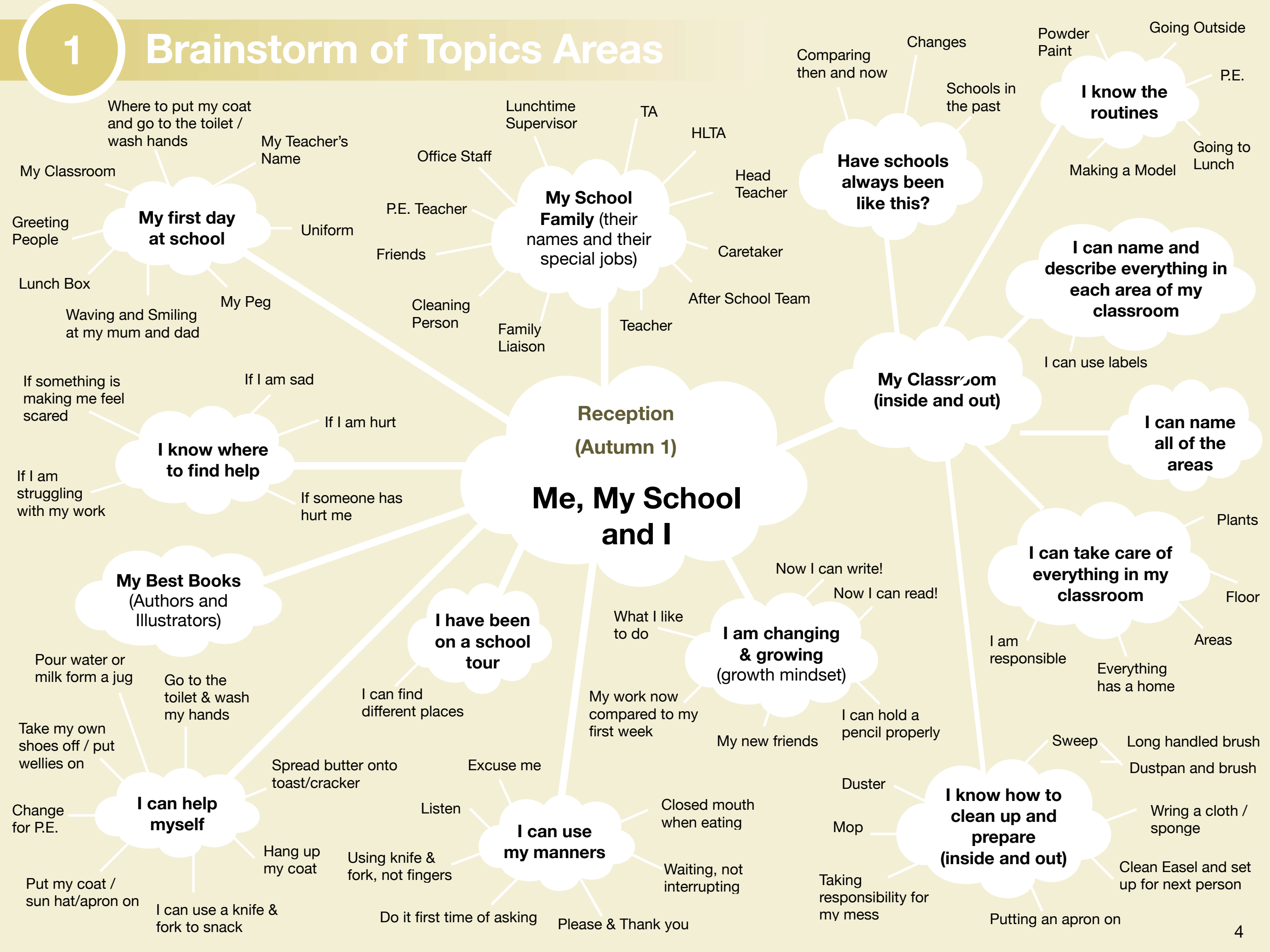


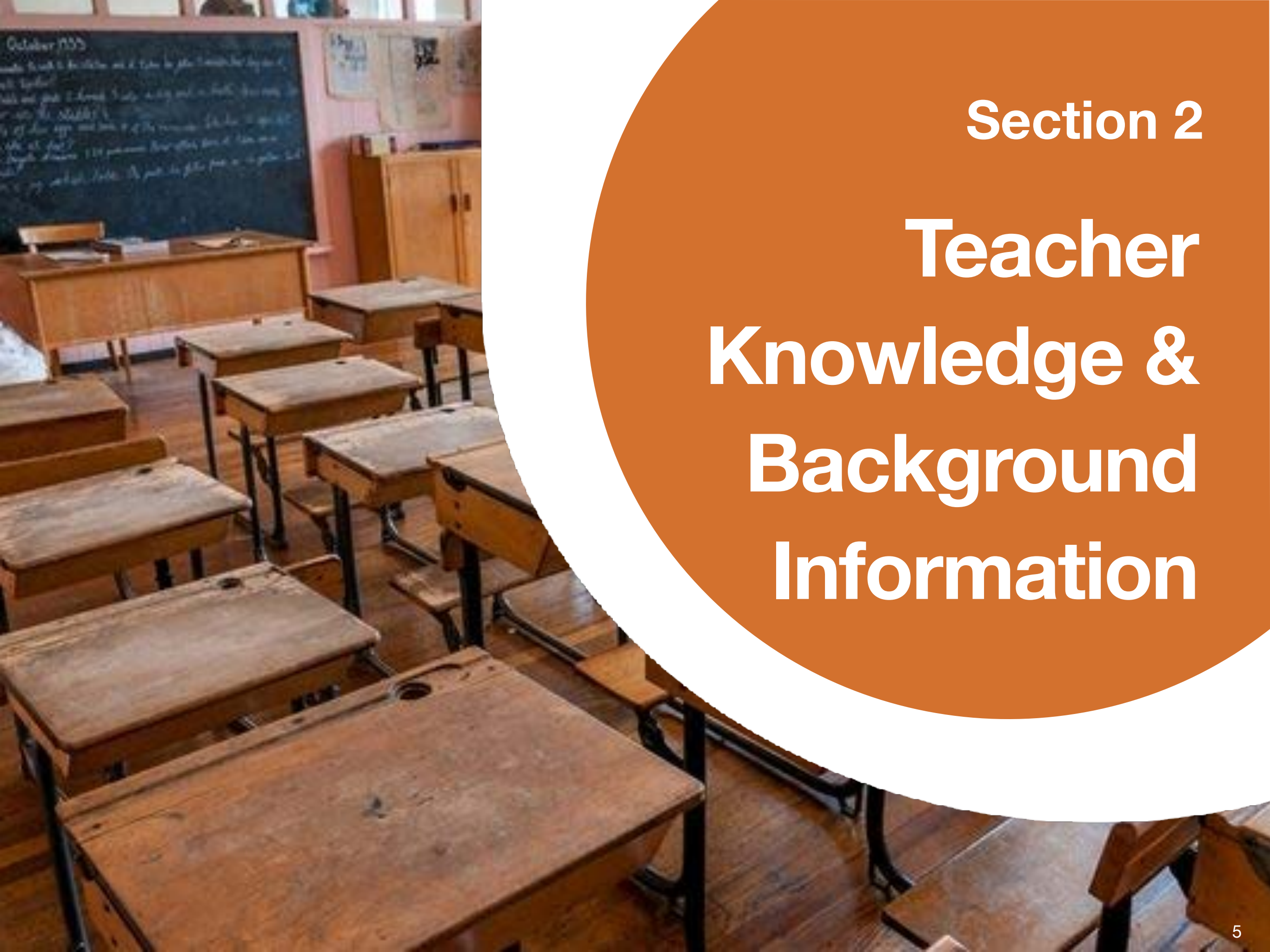
A photograph of a person's legs and hands as they sweep a floor with a broom. The person is wearing a yellow top, black shorts, white socks, and black sandals. The broom has a wooden handle and light-colored bristles. The floor is light-colored and appears to be outdoors or in a well-lit area. A large, semi-transparent green circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

Section 1

Brainstorm of Topic Areas

Brainstorm of Topics Areas





Section 2

Teacher Knowledge & Background Information

Background Information

This topic is unlike any other in that it is preparing your class for the year ahead, building expectations, setting standards, teaching routines, concentrating on self-help skills, increasing a child's vocabulary and above all, building independence.

If you do not take the time in Autumn 1 to prepare your class in this way, then expect to have a more difficult year. Also, with baseline and settling in taking a chunk of time out of your topic time, you need something which is very flexible.

If you want to use this planning as a Nursery Teacher, please make your provision slightly less sophisticated and concentrate on Vocabulary and Independence, rather than the history and geography of your school.

Independence

From self-help skills such as toileting and putting clothes on, to mixing your own powder paint and knowing how to wash and wring a cloth out to clean the easel down afterwards, this is an important time to make sure every child can do as much as possible for themselves.

Vocabulary

The vast majority of conversations you will have with the children, or that they will have with each other are going to be in provision. How rich can these conversations be if most of the children do not know what most of the provision is called?

We think there may be over 8,000 words to learn, including the names of objects, how they work, or how they are used. Look at each area of provision in turn. Describe and name the objects, discuss the possibilities, mention the skills that need to be learned and practiced, set challenges and high expectations.

Children in Early Years can learn approximately 20 new words per day – be ambitious!

Learning Processes and Routines

How to wash a cleaning cloth, mop a floor, sweep using a dustpan and brush, choose the right glue, use a hole punch and pipe-cleaner to fasten things together, putting a coat on, taking shoes off and putting wellies on, learning the general timetable of the day....

If you take a half term topic to learn these things and the rich vocabulary that describes them, children will be set up for the year and beyond.

Masterclasses

I have been advocating what I call 'masterclasses' for a few years now.

This is a 15-minute mini lesson on how to do something very small and specific, e.g. wring a cloth and all of the jobs listed previously.

Masterclasses could also include skills in provision such as how to use chalk or oil pastels, or how to mix shades of green, or literally anything the children need to learn to do.



Belonging

It is imperative that when transitioning from home or nursery to school, that the children have a very strong sense of belonging as well as knowing what to expect.

Hopefully, on transition day in the summer term, you will have captured some lovely paintings and drawings which could be mounted and up on display when the children first come in, in September.

Getting to know their Early Years family of Practitioners as well as the wider school members of staff will help settling, enormously.

Schools in the Past

Some of you may want to compare your school to schools in the past, later in the topic.

Or if you have a very old school building you may want to show children how the school day has changed over the decades.

There are some useful films and photos of schools in Victorian times, though of course your school may have its own archive.

Below are some useful videos of Victorian Schools:

https://youtu.be/FOmrCi-mh_k

<https://youtu.be/RhSCrDdF-sU>

https://youtu.be/GvVhCfE_sOc

<https://youtu.be/yB7HyNvEUxQ>

<https://youtu.be/uEQwBoDSXsU>



A Victorian School Day

Children in Reception are a little young for this, but you could dress up in Victorian clothes and spend a morning as Victorians in school.

Have the children chanting poems, copy writing, chanting phonemes over and over and copying a few drawings.

Let them play outside with a hoop, or Jacks, or marbles, and then compare the Victorian day to a normal one.

Comparing Then and Now

Classes were very large, the school regime was extremely strict and the school day was very long, sometimes lasting until 5 p.m.

Any windows in the classroom tended to be high up, making it impossible for pupils to see out. Teaching was monotonous with little variation.

Children would sit in the classroom in silence and listen to the teacher. Often children learnt by rote, which means repeating sums or sentences over and over again.

The teacher would teach reading, writing and arithmetic (maths), so children would have to know spellings of words and times tables off by heart.

The teacher would make sure that lessons were hard work, repetitive and really not much fun.

Boys and girls were educated differently, girls were taught needlework and home-making skills and boys woodwork. Children were expected to work hard at school and do well at exams.

Punishment: Boys were usually caned on their bottoms and girls were either beaten on their bare legs or across their hands.

A pupil could receive a caning for a whole range of different reasons, including: rudeness, leaving a room without permission, laziness, not telling the truth and playing truant (missing school).

Children did lessons all day long in the classroom. They could play outside at break time but there was no play during school time.

What is your school's history?

Do you have any photographs or archives that can help the children to see how it has changed over time?

They need to be able to see similarities and differences (or for some, what is the same and not the same), such as uniform, what the children are doing and so on.

Did any of the children's parents go to your school? Do they have any photographs to share?

Believe it or not, this is the same classroom in a school in Essex:



What is your school's location?

Consider showing an OS map and look on Google Earth to have children understand a little more about where their school is and its connections to the local community.

Try to find some of the children's houses and work out their route to school and what they see on the way.

Do you have links with the local church, scouts, swimming baths, local shops and pre-schools/ secondary school, library that you can find?

If your school building is old, can you find a map of the time it was built? How have things changed?





Section 3

Word Lists

Young children can apparently learn up to approximately 20 new words per day, so it is imperative, especially for those who have such a limited vocabulary, to learn lots of new provision and topic words as they arise. It is therefore important for you to use these words in conversation and through using books, experiences and images as you work with them.

On the next pages, we have offered list of provision words along with some notes and tips. Obviously, you cannot take hundreds of items and laboriously go through their names to help children to learn them, you will need to change things round and learn them in different ways, so we have provided are a few ideas to get you started on page 18.

Home Corner

Please don't label everything in the home corner. We don't label everything at home, so let's try to keep it looking authentic. If the children have trouble tidying up, have a match-back card on the inside of cupboard doors, or have them nearby for tidy up time.

Dressing up Clothes
Bed/Cot/Bedding
Baby / Dolly
Baby Bath
Changing Mat
Hair Brush
Nappy
Baby Shampoo
Clothes
Dining Table
Chair
Plate
Cup and Saucer
Knife, fork, spoon, teaspoon
Fruits
Meats
Vegetables
Breads

Dairy Produce
Other Food stuffs
Pan
Kettle
Frying pan
Collander
Kitchen Utensils
Pantry cupboard
Sink cupboard
Cooker/oven
Fridge
Microwave
Washing Machine
Washing Powder
Teapot
Sugar Bowl
Jug
Chopping Board

Aprons
Cutlery Box
Washing up Liquid
Iron
Ironing board
High Chair
Beaker
Dog/Cat
Dog/Cat bed
Telephone
Telephone Book
Clock
Alarm Pad
Bedtime Story
Ornaments
Notice Board with Magnets

Please read the notes on the next page

Notes about Home Corner Items/Words

- When talking about babies or dolls please refer to their names and ethnicity
- Ensure you name items in detail, according to what you have. For example as well as talking generically about clothes, also name the individual items such as jumper, socks etc. Or when talking about Ornaments, name the photo frame or vase as well as explaining that these are ornaments
- For grocery items (fruits, breads etc), if you can't tell what something is clearly because it is old, ask for new ones. At present, the wooden food that comes in types/crates is better than the plastic and seems to last far longer
- You may need to demonstrate how to use utensils
- For white goods (cooker, fridge etc) could you add a pretend logo that might match one in a child's house, e.g. Hotpoint. Mix them up amongst your 'appliances'
- For washing powder, I usually find a tiny box of the real stuff, use it up at home, stuff the box with newspaper then re-seal it. Make sure it is for sensitive skin in case of residue
- Make sure there is a message pad next to your telephone
- For the telephone book, I usually make one according to the role play scenario I am setting up. This might be a vets, where I have other Vets numbers, e.g. Dr. Dolittle, or Nurse, or Dog food supplier, medical supplier and patients (listing all different pets). Leave extra pages for children to fill in their own details.
- Every classroom should have both a digital and analogue clock
- To make a DIY Alarm pad, I use an old calculator and fix an alarm company logo on to it
- For the Bedtime Story, use a familiar story in a baby board book format
- The Magnetic Notice Board is primarily for children to use but I would start it off for them

Water Area

In the water area, I use galvanised metal bowls where I need a container. Talk to the children about what galvanised means (to coat with zinc – make it less likely to rust).

Jugs, Pots, Teapots (ideally metal ones)

Colander, Drainer, Strainer (use a wide range of items with holes)

Measuring Pots or Tubes (different sizes e.g. 3 small metal measuring pots, 3 tall capacity measuring tubes showing measurements, 3 shorter capacity measuring pots)

Ice cube trays, Syringes, Pipettes (varied selection)

Containers, Bottles, and Bottle Tops (have a bowl with different sized items. Concentrate on the size and shape of the containers rather than what used to be in them).

Boats and People (in a bowl and/or on the water. I tend to use Playmobil people that fit inside the boats)

Collection of **Shells** and **Pebbles** in a bowl. Name them individually according to what you have. Do you have a poster showing common British sea shells?

Bowl of **water foliage** – weighted and floating

Bowl of large and small **Sea Creatures** and **Divers** (under the water). Make sure that your octopus is not bigger than your blue whale! Name them in detail, according to what you have. Do you have a poster showing the names of the creatures you have in the bowl? You and the children need to be able to name some of them!

Sand Area

- If you have room for both wet and dry sand trays, that would be great. If not, set up for wet sand, as dry sand behaves like water.
- Children will need Masterclasses to know how to use the brushes properly and for you to set the standards in this area.
- The items marked with * are used for making complex small world scenarios.

Sand tray with or without lid
Sweeping brush
Dustpan & brush
Measuring cups
Moulds
Funnels
Scoops
Spades
Metal moulds & dishes
Trays
Green foliage *
Small blocks *
Playmobil figures
Natural Materials *
Pebbles *
Construction vehicles
Jungle animals
Dinosaurs
Desert creatures
Villian Animals
Small Village
Shells *

DT Area

Dust pan & brush
Cleaning cloth
PVA glue
Glue Sticks
Cellotape
Pipe cleaners
Rubber bands
String & wool
Fasteners *
Hole punch
Scissors
Fabric pieces
Cardboard
Small plastic scrap
Pompoms
Feathers
Wooden lollipop sticks
Sequins & beads
Googly eyes

* By fasteners, I mean paper clips, pins, treasury tags, bulldog clips etc.

Writing Area

Rulers
Pencils inc coloured pencils
Scissors
Gel pens
Highlighters
Cellotape dispenser
Fastening tools & stamps
Word puzzles
Letter tiles
White board, markers & erasers
Clipboards
Coloured paper & card
Squared paper
Envelopes
Stamps & ink pad
Alphabet chart
Homemade books
Magnetic/pin board
Writing desk
Rubbers?

Maths Area

Signs with questions e.g. What do you know about 5?
Clocks
Double sided counters
Pencils
Unifix cubes
Buttons
Large & small dice
Bead strings
Number tiles
Coloured counters
Till
Cash book
Cash box
Receipt book
Scales
Pots or tubs of 10's i.e. frogs, eyeballs, fish
Numicon plates
Whole/part diagrams
Small natural materials for counting i.e. shells, cones, bamboo rings, beans
Number formation sheets
Shut the box game
Counter containers
Hoops
Coconut mats

Clay Area

Dustpan & brush
Cleaning cloth
Clay
Utensils/Implements - use wood where possible
Moulds
Display area
Objects to make patterns ie keys, bobbins
Water
Storage bag

Book Area

Comfy seating
Cushions
Lamp
Rug
Favourite stories
Non-fiction
Alphabet books
Caring for books - run a mini masterclass
Book shelves
Bookcase
Animals/items associated with a story

Dough Area

- This area will require a few small group sessions before children can go independent!

Flour
Salt
Oil
Dough recipe
Water
Cream of Tartar
Food colouring
Candles inc number candles
Biscuit cutters
Shape moulds
Extruders
Menu pad
Waiter/Waitress Ordering Pad
Recipe Books and cards
Shopping List Pads and Pens

Art Area

Easel *
Paint palette
Water pots
Paint brushes
Sponges
Rollers
Charcoal
Oil Pastels
Drawing pencils/pens
Printing stamps
Ink pads
Roller & tray
Sketch pads
Items for still life/ideas
Paper **

* Children should always paint at an easel and I am assuming you are preparing them to use powder paint skilfully, rather than merely daubing with ready mix.

** A4 copier paper has no place here! Use Cartridge or Sugar paper cut into different shapes and sizes to create interest

Accessories to Blocks

Dinosaurs
Dragons
Farm
Chess pieces
People
Cars & road signs
Jungle animals
Safari animals
Woodland creatures
Natural materials
Green foliage
Small blocks lots of shapes
Colour blocks
Brio train & tracks
Inspiration pictures/book for pattern making
Loose parts
Trug with writing, drawing and measuring tools such as tape measure, spirit level and previously drawn architect plans

Learning New Words

Obviously, you cannot take hundreds of items and laboriously go through their names to help children to learn them, you will need to change things round and learn them in different ways, so here are a few ideas to get you started:

Ideas for learning Vocabulary for each area of provision:

1. Photo booth – set up a booth with a table covered in a white sheet. Set up lights and camera and have each item brought to you for photographing, or let the children do it.
2. What's missing from the tray – a shelf at a time
3. Basket of labels. Can you match the label to the item and say what it is called?
4. Scavenger hunt – put the items outdoors and time each group to see how quickly they can find and return the provision to its proper place. An extra point is given for each item they can name correctly
5. Music: Tap the beat as you say the syllables for each word or description
6. Pass the parcel/bag with name labels for items in an area. When the music stops, the child picks out a picture with a label, places it next to the item of provision and shouts its name. If it is correct, they stay in the circle for another turn.
7. Lift the flap poster. Put photos of each item on a shelf on a shelf shaped card and cover with a flap. Have the children describe what is under the flap for the others to guess, then write the name of the item on the flap.
8. Feely guess – put your hand through the small hole of a box or feel something which is covered in a chiffon scarf. Can you guess what it is and give it its proper name?
9. Hide collections of animals in the sand





Section 4

**Indoor
Classroom Plan
for Continuous
Provision**

We are literally encouraging you to go through each area of provision for the most part of this topic so that children know intimately how to use, name and describe everything in your classroom.

Each area of provision needs to have a card saying 'This is what the area looks like when tidy,' along with the tools the children need to clear up:



Each item should have a label or template. Every label should have a photo/picture, word label and amount.

If the amount is above 10, then use arbitrary amounts, such as, 'a few', loads of, some, lots of, many, quite a few, a multitude of, etc.



Consensus and Consistency

Please make sure there is consensus amongst the staff team that everyone calls the equipment by the same name, or description.

Please ensure all staff know all the routines you are teaching the children and that they are fully behind what you are doing in terms or building high levels of independence alongside high expectations for children.

You are trying to teach them to be as self-sufficient as possible and do things like cleaning, tidying, classifying and sorting to very high standards.

You will need to teach the children how to use at least 2 areas per week if you are going to cover them all – and what about outside? It is just as important.

On the next few pages you will see photos of exemplar provision taken from the exemplary provision showroom at our Training Base in Bradford, along with hints and tips.

Learning new vocabulary

- See the ideas on page 18.

Water Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the Water Area
- Be able to name and talk about all of the items in water provision, including any photographs that have been used to stimulate ideas.
- Be able to talk about how water moves, feels and how it behaves in different temperatures.



Sand Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the Sand Area
- Be able to name and talk about all of the items in wet and dry sand provision, including any photographs that have been used to stimulate ideas.
- Be able to talk about how sand moves and how it feels when it is damp or dry.



DT Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the DT Area
- I would meticulously label the top shelf 'Tools and Fasteners' but not the middle shelf collage materials which should hopefully change quite often.



- Top Shelf: Tools and Fasteners and how they all work
 Middle Shelf: Collage Materials
 Bottom Shelf: Baseboards, cardboard, plastic, tin and foil

Role Play

- **Activity:** Get to know the Role Play Area
- Each time it is changed, make sure the children know exactly what you are trying to get out of the play and experiences and make sure the children are prepared to go along with.
- Do you have a good list of reading and writing items in the role play area and do children know how to use them correctly?
- Does your role play area have a strong theme and can it link to a role play scenario outdoors?



Writing/Graphics Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the Writing Area
- Make sure that children can use tools such as hole punches and treasury tags, or pipe cleaners, and can make interesting books to write in.
- Some home made books might have flaps to lift up, others a window or door, others a shape in the outline of the main feature of the story, for example a lighthouse...



Reading Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the Reading Area
- I don't understand why people template books. In the first place, children should be taught how to care for books and place them on the shelves properly. And secondly, it means they are exposed to minimal books about a very limited subject range.
- Children need topical books – fiction and non-fiction, their favourites, or classics. No matter what the topic, they need a basket of alphabet books, a basket of nursery rhyme books and some general non-fiction.

Small Construction

- **Activity:** Get to know the Small Construction Area
- If you don't have space for an area, just bring one box out at a time and place it on the carpet, or on a tray on a spare table.
- You could make a simple catalogue to show children the options for the following week
- Please make sure that you have construction play which is suitable for your age group:
 - 2's - 3's Duplo, Sticklebricks, Cleversticks
 - 3's - 4's Lego, Mobilo, Lasy, Knex, Cleversticks, Polydron
 - 4's – 5's The above, made harder through additional sets or from provocations



Snack Area



- **Activity:** Get to know the Snack Area
- Do you have a routine for children to show whether they have had snack or not? It is good for children to use this routine to learn their name or to mark-make publicly.
- You can teach so many skills through snack time: taking turns, pouring your own water or milk, counting how many grapes and raisins you are allowed, how many pieces of apple or banana, how to spread butter onto a cracker, how to make a fruit kebab on a cocktail stick, how you should use a teaspoon to put jam or marmalade on toast, how to chop a carrot...Please support children to do as much as possible for themselves (Mastery Orientation) rather than doing it for them (Learned Helplessness).
- Please ensure that you have talking points in the middle of the snack area, whether that is an unusual photograph or an interesting object. Many photographs should show where food has originated or certain foods that are available in, or are linked to, the different seasons.
- If possible, have children take responsibility for washing their crockery and cutlery and using the right colour cloth for food, to wipe their table space, and leave it ready for the next child.

Dough Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the Dough Area
- As one of the most popular areas of provision, it makes sense to hone in, and make sure we glean as many skills as possible from it.
- I would have children making their own dough using basic ingredients and a recipe that they learn over time. They would need a lot of supervision to start with, and yes, they are going to create a terrible mess each time, but this is how they will learn.
- Make sure that before children embark on making their own dough that you have had master classes with them on sweeping with a dustpan and brush, using a mop, and washing pots with a little washing up liquid. By teaching independence skills first, we can take the sting out of looking after a messy work space.
- The dough area should be full of maths opportunity (6/12/24 bun trays for halving and doubling, cutting for fractions, sharing it out, shape cutters).
- It should also be full of writing and reading opportunities: baking books and cards, recipes, shopping List Pad, Menu sheets, order pads, and labels.
- Children also need to know the names of all the equipment you have, including the word, extruder!



Music Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the Music Area
- In the music area, if you have one inside the classroom, you should have a basket of musical instruments and any objects that make good, 'found sounds' such as a plastic ruler.
- Make sure the children know what each one is called and can describe what kind of a sound they make.
- As children learn more over time about sound – volume, timbre, duration and beat, you might like to add a couple of musical terms too: staccato (sounds spikey and clipped) and Legato (sounds smooth, one sound blending seamlessly to the next.)



Art Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the Art Area
- You need an easel for children to paint at – they shouldn't be struggling at tables
- Small children should NEVER be offered A4 copier paper to paint on. They need cartridge or at least sugar paper in a large size – something substantial that can soak up wet paint and not disintegrate easily.
- I would also offer different shapes for children to paint on: large squares, rectangles, circles, triangles and long strips.
- Children should be offered powder paint to mix themselves. Daubing ready mix paint with thick brushes is for two year olds. From nursery onwards, they should be learning how to powder paint.
- Children also need good drawing pencils in the art area, charcoal pencils, oil and chalk pastels.



Investigation Area

- **Activity:** Get to know the Investigation Area
- Concepts, names of objects, processes and any safety measures need to be taught and updated every time you change this area.





Section 5

**Outdoor
Classroom Plan
for Continuous
Provision**

Outdoor is exactly the same as inside in that children need to be able to name everything that is in each of these areas, talk about how things work, or how they behave and so on.

Outdoors needs to be just as language rich as indoors. Staff need to take time to show children how they are to use and care for the resources as well as name and describe them.

Generally, can staff talk about the trees, shrubs and plants you have in your grounds? Are they knowledgeable about the insects and birds that live there, and their habitats? Can they talk about the different types of cloud and rain? Can they plant seeds, weed gardens and care for plants? This basic knowledge is important to pass on to the children.

Water

- You need pieces of guttering and piping in different lengths so you can talk about the short(er,est) long (er, est) and medium or middle sized items.
- Also, you need connectors for your pipes (one size bigger than your pipe so it comes on and off). Connectors could be straights, elbows or T-joints.
- Make sure everyone uses the same names for everything including funnels, jugs, sponge, paint kettle and brushes, roller and tray, clear tubing, and so on.



Sand

- Most people have cheap plastic toys in the sand, often some inherited from peoples throw outs at home. Think about each toy or resource, think about what a child is likely to do with it and assess whether the learning that will take place warrants its place in the sand box.
- Old fashioned Tonka Trucks, Playmobil 123 people with some scrap for tunnels and building are my choice of resource for sand.
- You could add sieves and molds, of course, but how are these different from inside?
- Shaped buckets and rampart molds are good for large sand castle building.
- Hand-held metal detectors and old magnetic letters offer an unusual way of doing phonics/spelling words.



Growing

- Make sure children can use and name spades, forks (hand held and long versions), a hoe, brush, sieve, rake etc.
- Ensure children know how to plant seeds, bulbs and so on.
- Please see our Growing Topic Planning Resource for more details.



Music

- A kitchen orchestra needs pots, pans and beaters
- Beaters could be real drum sticks and beaters, or wooden spoons and chopsticks.
- Uprturned buckets make great drums. You don't need real instruments outside, though a good kettle drum would be awesome!

Woodland Kitchen

- Different pots and pans are what most people put into woodland (mud) kitchens.
- These are my staples and why:
 - Enamel plates, bowls and cups for eating from/setting the table,
 - Cutlery for setting table, kitchen utensils for 'cooking'
 - Kettle, teapot, sugar bowl and jug for a tea party
 - Serving dishes with 1/2/3/4 compartments so that foodstuff can be halved, cut into thirds or quarters, or so that different dishes can be thought out
 - 6/12/24 bun trays to explore halving and doubling
 - Pestle and mortar to crush herbs and spices such as mint, cinnamon and star anise
 - Timer for the cooker



Digging



- Do you know about the sorts of things children are going to discover in soil?
- We need to know so we can talk about it!

Den Building

- I personally prefer children to create their own dens from crates, poles, cloth covers and ropes.
- There are so many words involved in the construction, problem solving and negotiation of this play!



Small World

- I would have a small world station outdoors
- This could be a shelf unit under cover, or in a shed.
- Children come to help themselves, go and find/make a complex small world environment for their resources and then bring them back again when they are finished.
- It's important that children have the opportunity to create their own small world environments, but if they need a little bit of support then you can set up something of your own - hopefully topical - that models quality play.



Blocks/Construction

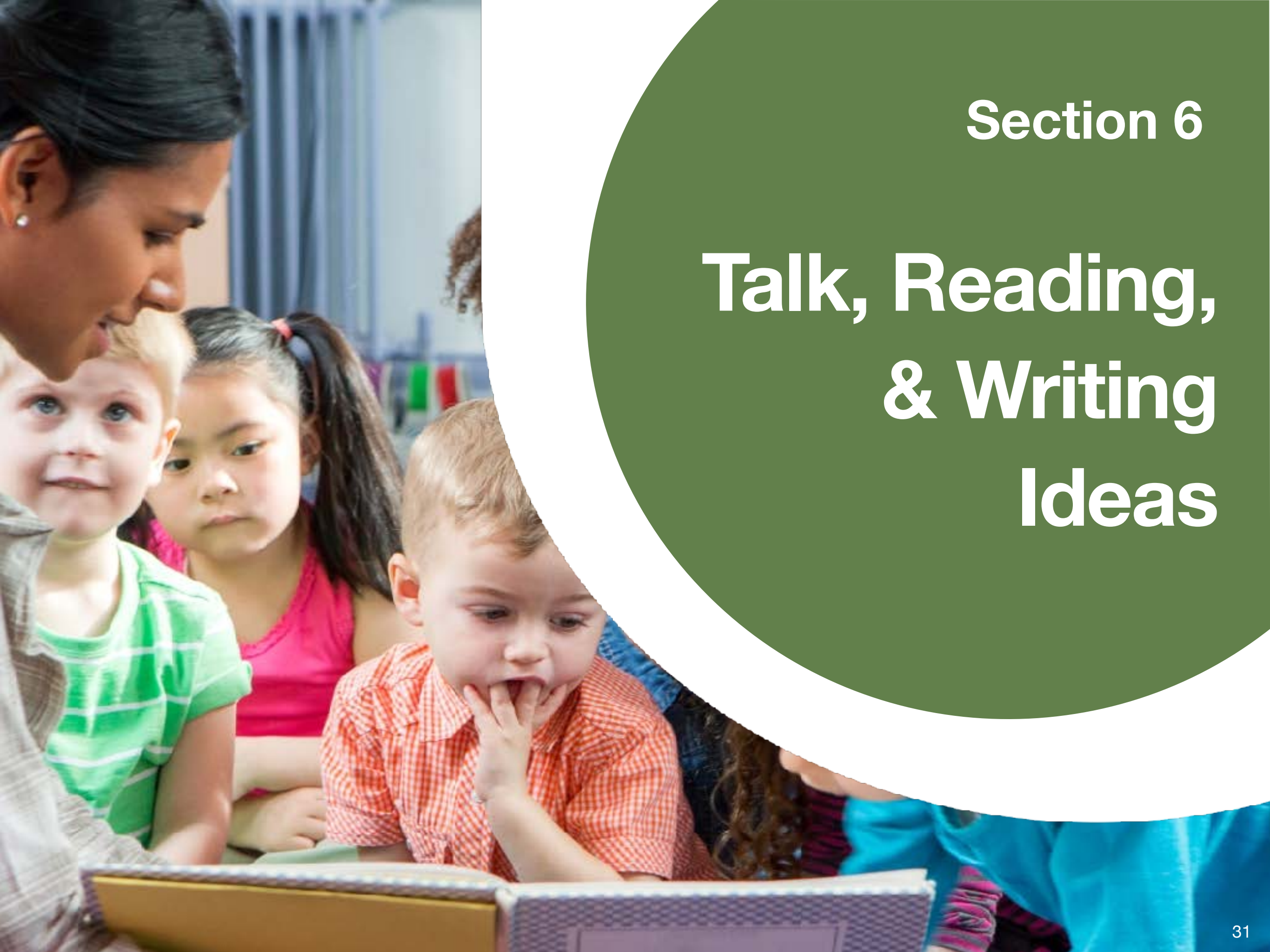
- If you only have a limited collection of large hollow blocks you may need to add large 'loose parts' such as wire reels, small tyres, cones, inside of carpet tubes etc.
- The emphasis here is always on size. Large constructions made by larger groups of children working together
- Ensure the area has a lot of space, out of traffic, and preferably a soft surface to kneel on
- Think about how children will design, label and evaluate their models and constructions. Make sure that paper, large clipboards, squared paper, spirit levels, measuring tapes and books/images are available at all times (and change with the topic)



Role Play

- Make it topical and if possible, try to match in with what you have inside.
 - Vets – Animal Rescue Centre
 - House – Shop
 - Castle – The Baddie's Castle
 - Garden Centre – Nursery growing seeds etc to sell
- You might need to be explicit with young children with regards to the links between one role play area and another





Section 6

Talk, Reading, & Writing Ideas

6 Talk, Reading & Writing Opportunities

General

Please see our specialised vocabulary lists and add to them according to the specific resources and books you are going to use to ensure the basic vocabulary is covered for the different parts of the topic.

Please ensure that each term you have:

- Seasonal photographs of water (mist/ice/rainbow) in the water area along with other talking points in that area,
- Photograph talking points in sand, such as desert animals, sand dunes or a close up
- Talking Point photographs in the snack area
- Themed photographs, graphics, shaped books and so on in the writing area
- Different shaped patterns and repeating patterns photographs to develop talk and inspiration in the maths area

All areas need something to generate talk, wonder, questions and thinking.

The whole topic is about talk and learning the names of everything in the classroom.

Try to notice and praise children who use a new word for them in their conversations, or those children who check the name or ask how to describe something.

Have a class celebration for every time a child learns a new skill such as painting.

I used to have a beanbag with lots of ribbons sewn on it and every time I stopped everyone to tell them good news, like this.

I would throw the beanbag into the air and everyone would do a huge cheer, with arms in the air.

But watching for me to catch the beanbag at which there was perfect silence.



Focus on Maps and Plans

Use the plan of your classroom or map of your outdoor area to send children on missions, orienteering, scavenging, instructing and labelling.

There are hundreds of ways of using maps and plans to generate reading and writing.

You could tie this in with your work on Google and where you are in relation to children's homes and other key features of your village, or town.



6 Talk, Reading & Writing Opportunities

Class Books (as well as floor books)

By class books I mean a book based on a single theme, such as retelling a story, explaining how to do something, a book about a visit or visitor etc.

These books are usually made of stiff paper with at least one photo or illustration per page, which is then laminated and bound into a book by a book binder.

The words of the book are usually written collaboratively in your sentence of the day session and as the children are in the photos and present at the writing, they can mostly all read the book and talk about it in detail.

They often become firm favourites in the reading corner.

For this topic you might make class books about...

- Our Classroom and how to care for it and each other
- Instructions on how to clean each area
- Our Outdoor Learning Environment
- How to paint
- How to fix things together
- Kindnesses in our classroom
- The Friends of Reception Class
- A book for Nursery: How to be happy in Reception

Alphabet Books or Bunting

Scrap books, covered in themed paper of child's illustration on a number of different themes:

- **The Shopping Alphabet Book.** (B Page = Baked Bean tin label)
- **The Sweets and Chocolate Alphabet Book** (A – Aero, B- Buttons, C- Caramel, D- Dime Bar...)

- **Reception Children Alphabet Book.** Adam holding an apple, Ben holding a ball, Caleb holding a cat, Danyaal holding a domino and so on. You might have to get creative to get all of the letters in, for example “Zebra is having a cuddle with Anya”

If you do bunting, put them up using pegs and allow the children to get used to the order. Then start switching it around so they have to notice when it is wrong!

Writing Scaffolds

Make sure the children can always find writing scaffolds such as alphabet mats, word banks and key words on key rings.

Remind them constantly to use them and have them beside them when they are writing.

Alphabet friezes high up on a wall or on working walls are a waste of time for little children. The support needs to be right next to them. They need to be able to touch it.

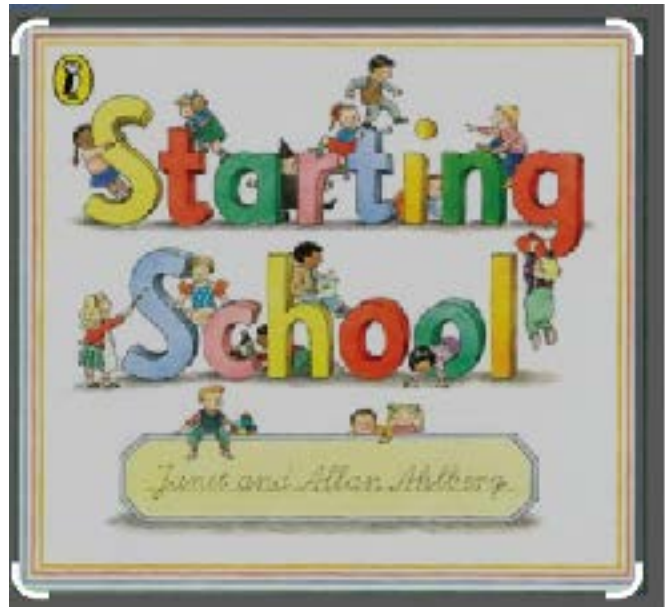
Make it easy for children to find different word banks over the year. Your classroom word bank might be in the shape of a building with a roof, your light house word bank in the shape of a light house and so on.

Leave each topic's word bank in the writing corner so they always know where they can find or retrieve words they need.



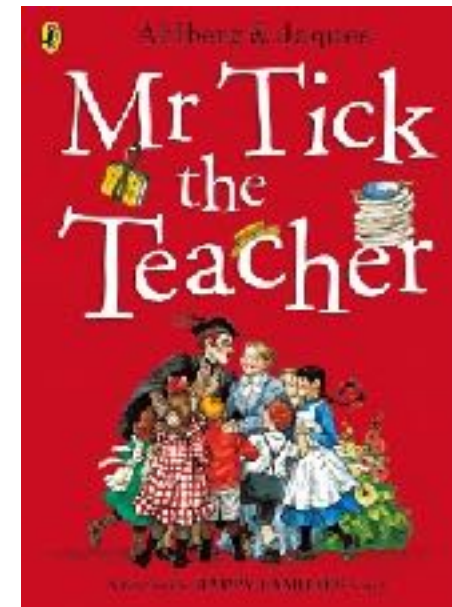
6 Talk, Reading & Writing Opportunities

Book Suggestions



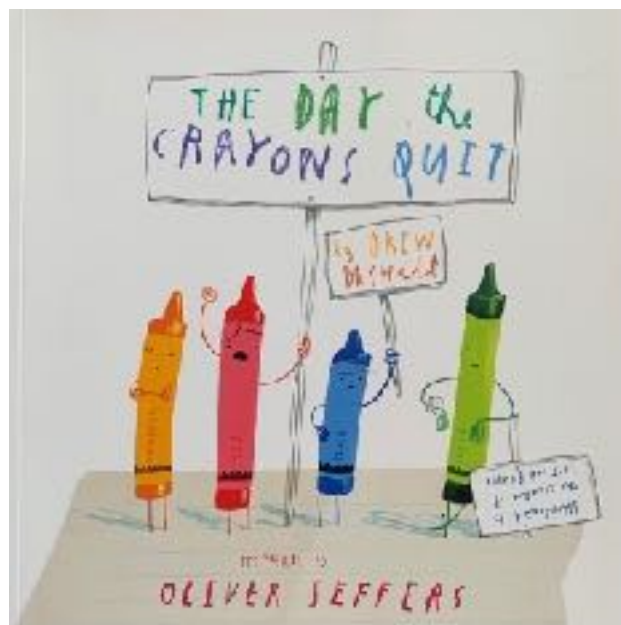
It's a classic but they are often the best!

Starting School is a great way of comparing one school with another.



Another classic Ahlberg!

This is a very funny story which also helps children to get their heads around how schools used to be compared to now.



Provision goes on strike!



One of my favourites!

Class Mascot

Adopt a cuddly toy, gnome, finger puppet, hand puppet or the like to become your class mascot.

They might turn up in the easel, clay or maths area and leave little notes to children, having noticed something good. If the children write back, then you need to offer a reply, as from the mascot.

Wilf (tasteful Garden Gnome) was my class mascot alongside Horace (an old teddy bear).



Horace had recently fallen out with his girlfriend – who would also show up occasionally and would write back to anyone who wrote to her.

Horace used to sign off each letter with a tiny paw print and wrote in the tiniest writing and used very small envelopes.

Wilf loved to be in different areas of the classroom and he watched for children getting it right- working hard, helping others, being kind, following the rules, following procedures, having original ideas, putting others first...

He would send a little postcard to each child, telling them what he saw and asking them a question, which they would write back and leave in his little treasure box.

A lonely spider also used to appear, feeling left out and dejected.

I recall his spidery handwriting and longing for loving friends who didn't miss people out.

Another favourite of mine is to have letters from 'lost' loved ones from provision.

Scenario: the hedgehog has gone missing and you suspect it is now lodging in a class member's home.

Have a letter arrive in your register from said hedgehog saying how upset he is that he is not with his family and he especially misses his good friend Otter who is now lonely without him.

Suggest ways he might come back to the classroom and how he might be so happy to be re-united with his friend. Send a letter to parents if this doesn't work.

Let them and the children know that you have an eye on everything and you know what is missing.

Let your imagination go wild with these ideas - we have had a plethora of fairies, giants, mummy dragons, lost dragons, naughty goblins, cheeky elves etc.

All of this, if you do it properly, can require a lot of work, diligence and patience, but it pays dividends.

Anything we can do to give a child's writing purpose and audience is worth our time and effort.

The Magic

Children want to believe in things, like fairies and Father Christmas, lost dragons and the like.

Many know we are just playing, but they also find imagination fodder irresistible and magical and we can easily obtain buy-in.

Once we have high levels of motivation, we have the chance for accelerated progress, as highly involved, concentrating children do the best learning.

My advice is to juice these ideas for all they are worth.

Put fairy doors in your classroom and corridors, have dragon tails hanging out of your suspended ceilings, have certain toys that come alive at night, or books that come to life, or magic characters.





Appendix 1

Making Small World Work For You

A Making Small World Work For You

“Well it’s easy to do small world if children aren’t going to trash it in 20 seconds!”

I hear this all the time when people look around our training and resource base or see our exhibits at conferences and it makes me sad.

As Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 teachers, we completely acknowledge that children will come along and use things we set up for them and change things around. To a certain extent we expect children to make some mess – small world is not for show.

However, if children are *trashing* things as soon as they approach them, and are leaving them like that to go elsewhere, you need to **ask yourself the following questions:**

- 1. How well have I established structures and routines with my class?**
- 2. How consistently and to what degree do children;**
 - expect to leave something as they found it?
 - understand the importance of leaving something set up for the next child to use?
 - respect resources and each other?
- 3. How have I supported them in making them as independent as I can? Have I;**
 - reminded them about what I expect?
 - taught them how to reset activities?
 - provided a reset photograph to support them in being accurate?
 - made sure all areas of the classroom model what good tidiness looks like, especially my areas such as windowsills, my desk and shelves?
- 4. How knowledgeably are children playing with this resource? How well have I prepared them? Have I;**
 - been explicit about what I expect?
 - used the photograph of the small world scenario on the large screen at circle time to discuss its features such as the place, setting, characters - what might happen and why?
 - offered information about the content to support high quality play and interaction?

Initial Preparation for High Quality Small World Play

- We need not always offer the whole thing: small world scenarios could build, or become more comprehensive over time
- Have one or two days of looking first – or a ‘no touch’ day. This will create a sense of anticipation, familiarising children with the ‘set up position’ of the scenario so they can reset it after play more efficiently
- Ensure clear labelling and training to tidy up well. This should include a match back card for younger children
- A group discussion about the small world scenario, probably on a smart board or equivalent including the scenario itself and photographs, maps, charts and footage to provide a rich body of information with which children can play more knowledgeably

Sustaining Interest

- changing the scenario to renew interest or to change the story perhaps by adding or removing a character, letter, signpost or other prop.
- use of books, images, globe, and other prompts to support additional knowledge over time

Ensure Quality of Learning

- Having a strategy will help to create knowledge rich play and broaden experiences, whilst always starting with and valuing what children already know.

Case Study Example:

In order to develop children’s geographical knowledge of Africa initiated by a focus on the story of ‘Handa’s Surprise’, the practitioner planned the following scenario:



For the first two days, the scene was available for children to look at and talk about, but not to touch. An adult hovered around the scene to encourage children to look carefully, share their observations and thoughts with one another and to ask questions, which were recorded.

At group time on the second day, the teacher presented a photograph of the scenario on the interactive whiteboard for children to discuss their observations and questions.

The discussion mainly centred around the huts and livestock as children compared them with their own homes and pets. The idea that these animals were not pets was puzzling to some.

The teacher then asked where the children thought the village might be in the world. One child wondered whether it was near Handa’s village. (check original story)

The teacher showed children photographs of a similar village called Ndjamem in the African country of Chad. The group found Chad on the globe and in an atlas. They discovered that it is a very hot country and one of the languages the people speak is French. They found out

A Making Small World Work For You

what people in Chad eat day to day, some of the jobs they did and about transport.

Children's own questions that adult had recorded so far were discussed, and the teacher used the internet to find out about how the houses were built in order to satisfy one child's curiosity.

Lastly the teacher outlined her expectations with regard to how carefully the children would play with the scenario and how they would leave it set up for their peers. Both reset card (A4, laminated in a sturdy holder) and match-back card were discussed to ensure the expectations were clear.

The children were allowed to play with the scene on the third day. Adults recorded some of their talk and engaged in conversations about the children's story making.

(Ch) *"And the lady did give the goats some grass to eat and they did drink from in the river but it is dirty."*

(Ad) *"I'm not sure there would be any grass for the goats to eat because grass cannot grow in very hot countries. Did we see any grass on the photographs we looked at? How can we find out about what the Chadians feed their goats?"*

(Ch) *"Can we look on the iPad?"*

(Ad) *"Ok let's look. It says the people have to grow a special crop called Sorghum because grass like ours doesn't just grow in their garden. A crop is something you grow on purpose to feed people or animals."*

(Ch) *"Can we eat it?!"*

A few days later, as interest in the scenario begins to wane the teacher added 2 crocodiles to the scene, creeping toward the village, partly hidden by undergrowth.

She left it for the children to discover before discussing it later in the day at group time.

The children felt they should warn the villagers about the threat, by creating a sign they agreed should say, "Beware of the Crocodiles!".

The teacher reminded them that the people speak French so they used Google Translate to find out how to write their message in French.

Two days later, the teacher removed all of the people and animals, and left the crocodiles clambering over an upturned chair. When the children entered the classroom and saw the scene, the teacher used the following question.

(Ad) *"What happened to the people and their animals?!"*

(Ch 1) *"The crocodiles ate them all!"*

(Ch 2) *"No! They saw our message and they runned away!"*

(Ad) *"Where did they go? How do we know they are safe?"*

(Ch 2) *"We could write a letter and find out!"*

(Ad) *"Let's see where the nearest post office to Ndjamem is and send a letter to the Elder."*

Blank postcards, the post office address, airmail stickers and pencils were left out with the small world scenario.

Two children decide they want to go to the village and take their mini-me's to the small world scenario. The practitioner took tableaux photographs of the different scenes where the girls entered the village, introduced themselves and interacted with the other characters, asking questions, telling them about their own families and finding out their lives. These photographs were then used in focused collaborative writing sessions with the group to create a book, which became a favourite in the reading area.

This sort of preparation might look long winded, but compare the quality of learning, the growth of knowledge and enquiry skills that grew from it.

Think about the empathy the children had for the villages, the growing respect for their peers in taking better care of the resource and the dividends your hard work in setting it up in the first place now pay.



Appendix B

Potential Curriculum Coverage

Framework Coverage (Reception)

Communication and Language

Listening

Learn and use new topic Vocabulary through the day

Ask questions to find out more

Articulate Ideas and thoughts in well-formed sentences

Connect one idea to another using a range of connectives

Describe events in some detail

Use talk to work out problems and organise thinking and activities, and to explain how things work and why they might happen

Develop social phrases

Engage in storytimes

Listen to and talk about stories to build familiarity and understanding

Retell the story, once they have developed a deep familiarity with the text , some as exact repetition and some in their own words

Use new vocab in different contexts

Listen carefully to and learn rhymes and songs paying attention to how they sound

Engage in non-fiction books

Listen to and talk about selected non-fiction to develop a deep familiarity with new knowledge and vocabulary

Personal Social and Emotional Development

See themselves as a valuable individual

Build constructive and respectful relationships

Express their feelings and consider the feelings of others

Show resilience and perseverance in the face of a challenge

Identify and moderate their own feelings socially and emotionally

Think about the perspective of others

Physical Development

Revise and refine the fundamental movement skills they have already acquired:

Rolling

Running

Crawling

Hopping

Walking

Skipping

Jumping

Climbing

Progress toward a more fluent style of moving, with developing control and grace

Develop the overall body strength, co-ordination, balance and agility needed to engage successfully with future physical education sessions and disciplines

Develop small motor skills so that they can use a range of tools competently, safely and confidently.

Use their core muscle strength to achieve a good posture when sitting at a table or the floor.

Combine different movements with ease and fluency

Confidently and safely use a range of large and small apparatus indoors and outdoors, alone and in a group

Develop overall body-strength, balance, co-ordination and agility

Ball and other skills

Handwriting style

Literacy (non-secretarial)

Read books to build up their confidence in word reading, their fluence, understanding and enjoyment

Write short sentences with words with known sound-letter correspondences using a capital letter and full stop

Re-read what they have written to check that it makes sense

Understanding the World

Talk about the members of their immediate family and community

Name and describe people who are familiar with them

Comment on familiar situations in the past

Compare and contrast characters from stories, including figures from the past

Draw information from a simple map

Understand that some places are special to members of their community

Recognise that people have different beliefs and celebrate special times in different ways

Recognise some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries

Explore the natural world around them

Describe what they see, hear and feel whilst they are outside

Recognise some environments that are different from the one in which they live.

Understand the effect of changing seasons on the natural world around them.

Expressive Arts and Design

Explore, use and refine a variety of artistic affects to express their ideas and feelings

Return to and build on their previous learning, refining ideas and developing their ability to represent them

Create collaboratively, sharing resources, ideas and skills

Listen attentively, move to and talk about music, expressing their feelings and responses

Watch and talk about dance and performance art, expressing their feelings and responses

Sing in a group or on their own, increasingly matching the pitch and following the melody

Develop storylines in their pretend play

Change over Time

If you would like to add a science or History element to the topic, you could look at change (reversible, unreversible) as in powder paint, making a mess, putting everything away again, how I am changing

Have you seen the other topic-based resources in this set?

<https://leadingchildren.com/blogs/resources>



Thank you to our supporter:



Leading Children Ltd, 365 Canal Road, Bradford, BD2 1AW

www.leadingchildren.com

Email office@leadingchildren.com