

Telling Family Stories

A Kindergarten Readiness Outreach Workshop



Early Literacy Focus

Simple shifts in the way we talk to and interact with children can have a significant impact on their brain development. Ask open-ended questions and encourage engaging conversation to help children build vocabulary and develop narrative skills.

The Program

This is a workshop for the whole family to learn about different ways to tell family stories and develop skills for talking with children.

Overview

Activity	Focus	Time
Introduction	Share message	5 min
Book	Select a book that focuses on a family or sharing a family story	10 min
Family Activity: The Day We Met	How to tell a story (Narrative Skills)	10 min
Individual Activity: Draw Your Story	Working memory; assists in reflection	10 min
Family Activity: Our Tree	Engineering – how to plan the tree; talking together	20 min
Wrap Up	Reflect and Goal Set	5 min

The Details

Introduction

Welcome participants and deliver the following messages:

- This is a program for the entire family.
- We will do storytelling activities that can help your child get ready for kindergarten:
 - We will demonstrate how to tell a story.
 - We will do a drawing activity that can help children tell their own stories and use their memories – being able to remember what happened in a book is an important early literacy skill and will also help your child function in a school environment.
 - We will draw a family tree, which involves planning and some engineering. Making a plan helps children develop a sense of self-regulation and understanding how a family tree branches is an important engineering concept.
- Everything we do today is something you can continue to do at home.
- YOU are a child's best teacher, and doing things together helps your child learn.

Book

Sharing a book is a great way to introduce a concept to the group and model reading aloud to adults. Select a book about a family or a family story. Point out that the story has a beginning, middle, and end. It may also have a repeated phrase. If there is time, talk about how the book relates to the lives of the families in the room. Being able to relate to a book will help with discussion and the enjoyment of reading. Check out the book list in this document for ideas and recommendations.

Share Research

At the end of this program plan are several different research-based comments to share during this program. Choose one or two that you would like to focus on, and practice saying them out loud in your own words before the workshop. As you move through the different activities in the workshop, find ways to share the comments. All of these comments are based on Every Child Ready to Read (ECRTR) research and were written by early childhood expert Saroj Ghoting for the Idaho Commission for Libraries' long-running ECRTR workshops.

Family Activity: The Day We Met

Supplies Needed:

None

Have each family sit together and have the adults and older children tell the story of the day they met one of the younger children (if there is more than one young child, try to focus on the one who will be starting Kindergarten next). Before they begin, ask that they organize the story with a beginning, middle and end, and try to introduce a new vocabulary word or two. Leave time for children to ask questions.

As the stories are wrapping up, deliver these messages:

- Make telling family stories part of your daily routine and encourage your child to tell them back to you and ask lots of questions to help them develop narrative skills.
- Being able to listen quietly to a story is an important executive function ability that will help children focus when they are in school and understand what they are hearing.
- One way children learn vocabulary is from listening to stories. They listen to understand what is being said, which helps them learn new words and their meaning. Stories aren't found just in books. You can tell stories about your day, your memories from growing up, or something about your child's life.

Individual Activity: Draw Your Family Story

Supplies Needed:

Large piece of construction paper (ICfL)

Crayons (ICfL – in school supply kit)

Markers (Library)

Have each participant draw a picture of a family story. It doesn't have to be the story from the first activity – it can be a story of something funny that happened to someone in the family, a memorable weekend, or even something that happens every day, like having dinner together or watching a favorite TV show. Leave time to talk about the drawings. If there is time, you can have the participants fold the large piece of paper into a smaller booklet and write/draw a short book.

During this activity, deliver this message:

- For children, being able to recall and retell (or draw) a story, helps them develop narrative skills and use their working memory.

Family Activity: Our Tree

Supplies Needed:

- Large piece of paper (ICfL)
- Crayons (ICfL – in school supply kit)
- Markers (Libraries)
- Rulers (ICfL – in school supply kit)
- Scratch paper (Libraries)

On a large sheet of paper, have families plot out and draw their family tree. You may want to share examples of what different types of family trees looks like (see links on the webpage for this workshop) and the type of information to include – name, year of birth, abbreviations for married (m.), etc. Use this activity to introduce counting activities (how many people in each generation, or how many cousins do you have, etc.).

Wrap Up

As the program is wrapping up, deliver the following messages:

- Today, your family came together to tell family stories and help your children develop important early learning skills.
- When we told stories of the day a child was born, you modeled how to tell a story to your child and helped them develop narrative skills and build their vocabulary.
- Drawing a family story helps children improve their memories and learn to tell their own stories, which is an important early literacy skill.
- Making a family tree involves a lot of planning! This type of activity helps children develop executive function abilities and gives them a chance to count, which is important for early math.
- Check out the Vroom tips in your child’s school supply kit for more ways to tell stories together.

As a final activity, give adult participants the parent survey to fill out and return to you. Give children the Telling Family Stories Kids Reflection Activity to work on while their grown-ups are filling out the survey.

Return completed adult surveys to Jennifer Redford at ICfL:

- Scan and email them to: jennifer.redford@libraries.idaho.gov
- Mail them to Jennifer’s Attention at ICfL: 325 W. State St., Boise, ID, 83702
- **Remember to count** the number of kids and adults who attend your program – you will need those numbers for your Summary Report

Supplies:

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| Pack of large construction paper (ICfL) | Rulers (ICfL – school supply kit) |
| Crayons (ICfL – school supply kit) | Scratch paper (Library) |
| Markers (Library) | |

Books

“Fry Bread” by Kevin Noble Maillard

“On the Day You Were Born” by Margaret Wild

“When a Dragon Moves In Again” by Jodi Moore

“Drawn Together” by Minh Le

“Mama, Do You Love Me?” by Barbara M. Joose

“I Loved You Before You Were Born: A Love Letter from Grandma” by Anne Bowen

“The Family Book” by Todd Parr

“Families, Families, Families!” by Suzanne Lang

“Littles” by Kelly DiPucchio

Research-Based Comments to Adults*

***Select a few of these comments to share with the group as they are doing the activities in the workshop.**

Importance of Talking

One of the most important skills is vocabulary or knowing what words mean. You can help your children increase their listening and speaking vocabulary. A listening vocabulary includes the words children understand when you speak to them. A speaking vocabulary includes the words children use when they talk. A child’s listening vocabulary is usually much larger than his or her speaking vocabulary.

Knowing the meaning of many spoken words will help your children understand what written words mean once they start reading. A large and rich vocabulary is strongly related to a child’s reading ability. The more spoken words a child knows, the more printed words he or she will be able to recognize and read. A large listening and spoken vocabulary makes it easier for a child to connect a written word to its meaning.

The early years are a critical time to develop children’s vocabulary. To be ready to learn to read, most children need to have about 15,000 words in their listening vocabulary. That means they need to understand the meaning of about 15,000 words when they hear them. The best way to help children develop a large vocabulary is to talk and read with them.

If English is not your first language, speak to your child in the language you know best. This allows you to explain things to your child more fluently. Your child will be able to translate what he or she knows later, rather than having to learn both the concept and the English word at the same time.

Talking is one of the best ways for children to learn new words; and the more words your children know the easier it will be for them to sound out words and to understand what they read when they learn to read.

Ways of Talking

Labeling games are just right for young children and a wonderful way to learn new words. Babies love playing, “Where is your nose? Where are your toes?” Older children love to label things too. As you go through your day, label objects and events in your child’s world. For example, “Look, Nina is on the wavy slide. What do we have at home that’s wavy?”

Label feelings as well as things. “How did you feel when you went down the slide?” Talking about feelings is one way to build your child’s vocabulary. We often find it easier to talk about the basic feelings like happy, sad, angry. However, it is important to talk about other feelings as well, not only so that children understand the words, but also because being able to identify feelings also helps them regulate or handle their feelings in a positive way. It has also been shown that children who can identify their own feelings are more likely to show empathy toward others.

Talk about what you’re doing as you go through your day. Ask your child questions, listen to the answers, and then ask another question based on what your child said.

One way to talk about words is by putting them in groups. You might have a word jar with words and pictures of words on slips of paper, or you might have some different toys or other items that your child is playing with. Talk about the different categories of words—some are about feelings, some are things, some might be places. For the toys or other items, maybe some are cooking utensils, some are vehicles, some may be farm animals, others are wild animals, and so on. Grouping items helps with vocabulary and with abstract thinking and understanding.

Children’s language and vocabulary grow through day-to-day interactions and experiences. Talking with the important people in their lives is one of the best ways for children to learn new words.

Use new and different words to express the same idea. “Remember when we went to the park yesterday? We’re going to make the identical trip today. We’ll do all the same things and repeat all the fun we had.”

One way children learn vocabulary is from listening to stories. They listen to understand what is being said, which helps them learn new words and their meaning. Stories aren’t found just in books. You can tell stories about your day, your memories from growing up, or something about your child’s life.

Speak to your child often during the day and try to use many different words to express your ideas. Children love to imitate, and they will try to imitate your speech.

As you talk and explain what a new word means, you help your child increase vocabulary and general background knowledge. This will help your child understand more when he or she begins to read.

Retelling stories helps children understand how stories work which will later help them understand the stories they read.

Explaining a word or two or adding a new word or two while sharing books is one good way to build your child’s vocabulary and background knowledge, both of which will help them later understand what they will read.

When children are encouraged to make up stories, they are talking about things that are not in the “here and now.” This means they have to imagine things not present which adds many more possibilities for new words.

You can use wordless picture books and make up a story together with your child. One of the wonderful things about telling stories with a wordless book is that the story is never told in exactly the same way. With wordless books, you can develop imagination along with language and vocabulary skills.

Sharing wordless books helps to build children’s listening and speaking skills (oral language skills)—children are listening to what you (the adult) are saying about the pictures and children are saying their own ideas about what is happening in the pictures.

Sharing wordless books develops a child’s narrative skills because you are encouraging the child to tell the story. This helps them later to understand what they read. It also develops their sense of story and how stories work.

When you share wordless books with your children you can build their vocabulary by adding more words to what they say. Purposely adding words, synonyms or descriptive words that your child is not familiar with, builds their vocabulary in a natural way. (Role play an example of this with a wordless book or a picture.)

Talking about what happens in a wordless book encourages your child’s creative and critical thinking, which helps with comprehension.