Reading aloud, singing, doing fingerplays and engaging young children in conversation are all ways that parents and caregivers lay the foundation for young children to become successful readers and writers. The following activities were created to promote literacy with young children through hands-on, real-life experiences that will stimulate learning.

Have fun and “Grow a Reader!”

“MOOOOSIC” ON THE FARM

- **Old MacDonald Had a Farm**: Use puppets, stuffed animals, flannel board pieces or plastic farm animals to introduce each animal. As you sing the song, get suggestions for animals from the children.

- Visit your local library for more great farm-related songs on CD, such as: *BINGO, The Chicken Dance* and *The Farmer in the Dell*.

**LIFE ON THE FARM**

**Indoor Dramatic Play**: Use a farm play set to create a farm indoors. Add blocks for building barns, pig pens, corrals and fences. Blocks can represent other farm items like hay bales or troughs and can be clapped together to sound like ponies trotting. Try bringing in real pieces of hay or a patch of grass to enhance play.

**Outdoor Dramatic Play**: Set up a pretend farm outdoors. If possible, provide authentic items found on a farm such as overalls, straw hats, boots, work gloves and buckets.
MORE FARM FUN

Farm Animal Day: Gather stuffed farm animals or ask each child to bring a toy farm animal from home. Use the animals in dramatic play, and enhance the experience by providing such items as blocks, boxes, straw, and buckets.

Barnyard Parade: Ask each child to pretend to be a favorite farm animal. Children can demonstrate the sounds their animals make as they parade around the room. Children might also enjoy having a parade with their stuffed farm animals.

Barnyard Count: Put out several toy farm animals and let the children sort the animals according to type. Count the number in each group.

Nesting Hen: Place some plastic eggs under a pillow. Have a child sit on the pillow and guess how many eggs are under the pillow. Count the eggs with the child.

POETRY ON THE FARM

The Cow

The friendly cow all red and white,
I love with all my heart:
She gives me cream with all her might,
To eat with apple-tart.
She wanders lowing here and there,
And yet she cannot stray,
All in the pleasant open air,
The pleasant light of day;
And blown by all the winds that pass
And wet with all the showers,
She walks among the meadow grass
And eats the meadow flowers.

By Robert Louis Stevenson

The Giving Farm

Hens give eggs.
Pigs give ham.
Cows give milk.
Strawberries give jam.
Bees give honey.
Goats give cheese.
Farms give food,
I’d like some, please.

By Vicki Witcher

PURPLE COW

Teach the following poem and help children make purple cows for a snack:

I never saw a Purple Cow
I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you, anyhow,
I'd rather see than be one.

Purple Cow Recipe: (per child)
¾ cup milk
1 ½ tablespoon frozen grape juice concentrate
¼ cup vanilla yogurt
Pour into container with lid and shake until well blended.
Pour into a tall glass.
CLIP-CLOP

Make a stick horse! For this adult-guided activity you will need:

- One sock for each horse head
- Stuffing or polyfill (from a fabric or craft store)
- Pair of scissors for cutting
- Yarn, twine, or tape for attaching the horse heads onto the sticks
- Yarn or ribbon for manes and bridles
- Buttons, googley eyes, or felt circles for eyes
- Felt for ears, if desired
- Stick (dowel or cut-off broom handle about 3 ft. long)
- Quick drying glue or hot glue and glue gun*

Start by helping each child stuff a sock as full as possible to make the head, using the toe of the sock for the horse’s nose. Eyes can be made by cutting out felt or using buttons and gluing them onto the sock. Yarn or ribbon may be cut and glued on for the manes and for bridles. (Hint: the more yarn, the better the mane will look.)

When the children are finished adding features, push the stick up into the sock until you reach the heel. Add stuffing as needed. Close the opening of the sock around the stick using the tape, twine or yarn.

Put on some music, invite children to climb on their horses and do some galloping. Use cowboy music for your horseback activities.

*adult supervision is required

FARMER’S ART

Paint with Tractors: Set out toy tractors, paint in shallow containers and large paper. Children run the tractors' wheels through the paint and then drive the tractors on the paper.

Buttermilk Chalk Pictures: Provide cardboard, brushes, colored chalk, and 2-3 tablespoons of buttermilk in a small container. Children paint the cardboard with buttermilk then draw over it with chalk. Variation: After painting the cardboard, children grate chalk over the buttermilk.

Sweetened Condensed Milk Paint: Make glistening fingerpaint by mixing sweetened condensed milk and food coloring. Paper plates or other sturdy paper work best for this activity. Variation: Use paint brushes instead of fingers to paint.

Straw Painting: Loose straw is usually available at no cost from agricultural feed supply stores and lawn and garden centers. Children can use pieces of straw for paintbrushes. Children can also add pieces of straw to their art work.

Seed Collage: Provide several types of inexpensive dried seeds, beans, and/or grains such as popcorn, lima beans, pinto beans, navy beans, oats, rye grass, etc. Seeds and grains may be purchased in bulk at garden supply stores. Draw attention to the variety of sizes, colors, and shapes. Children apply glue to paper or cardboard and attach the different types of seeds and grains.

Farm Weaving: Chicken wire may be cut into squares for weaving. Put masking tape or duct tape around the sharp edges. Set out fabric strips, raffia, twine, ribbon and yarn. Children then weave the materials in and out of the holes. Children can also weave on a chain link fence.
What did the corn stalk say to the farmer?..... “I'm all ears!”

Examine an Ear: From a farmer’s market or your local grocery store, buy one or more ears of corn still in the husk. Invite the children to peel off the outer covering and the corn silk. Did you know that there is one silk for every kernel of corn on the cob? Talk about all the different parts of the ear including the husk, kernel, silk and cob.

Plucking Kernels: Allow children to use tweezers to pull off kernels of dried corn. If possible, use colorful Indian corn.

Grind Corn: If you have access to a molcajete or other mortar and pestle, the children can try grinding the kernels.

Popcorn: Show the children popcorn kernels before they pop. Make some popcorn. Dance like popcorn kernels. Enjoy a popcorn snack!

Corny Products: Show the children some examples of the many things that come from corn such as popcorn, cornmeal, cornstarch, and corn oil.

Corn Art: Pour paint onto a cookie sheet or tray. To make prints, roll dried corncobs or ears of corn with the kernels intact through the paint. Then roll them across large sheets of paper. The children may stamp with the ends of the corn cobs or paint the kernels and admire. Dried corn cobs may be purchased from stores where they are sold as chew toys for dogs or food for squirrels, rabbits, and other wildlife.

CORN STARCH Oobleck

Make Oobleck!

- Put dry cornstarch, a product made from corn, on a tray or in a tub. Encourage children to touch and feel the starch.
- Help children use spray bottles to add a little water to the cornstarch, then feel it again. Children can continue adding water until the mixture is completely moist (about equal parts cornstarch and water).
- Add spoons, spatulas, rolling pins, or whisks for experimenting with the mixture. Suggest that children try giving clumps of the mixture to each other and see the clumps disappear.
- If you leave the mixture in the tub overnight it will be dry by morning. Be sure to show the children and talk about what happened. Let them see what happens when they add water again.

This is a great activity to stimulate language. Children may use words such as thin, thick, dry, silky, squeaky, soft, and even scratchy as they explore.

Oobleck is messy play but a clean kind of messy. If the white powder gets on clothing it can be brushed off. If it gets on the floor it can be picked up with a broom and dustpan or a vacuum cleaner.
Ask the children what kinds of things they think farmers grow on their farms. Vegetables and fruits may be grown for people to eat. Grass may be grown to feed cows and horses, produce seed for lawns, and make cereals.

One simple way to experience growing is to plant some grass.

You will need:

**Grass seed**: Grass seed is available in bulk in garden stores and in natural food stores. Some types of grass grow more quickly than others. You might want to ask for a quick-growing (fast-germinating) variety.

**Containers**: Anything low and wide will do. Small clay saucers such as the 4-inch diameter saucers used under flower pots work well.

**Potting soil**: to fill the saucers or bowls

**Large spoons**: for scooping dirt into the bowls

**Spray bottles**: to moisten the soil

**Water**: to fill the spray bottles

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**BE A FARMER! GROW SOME GRASS!**

What you do:

- Set up a table with bowls of soil, large spoons, a bowl of seed and spray bottles.

What the children do:

- The children fill their cups about 3/4 full with soil, using the spoons or their hands.
- Using the spray bottles, add water to the soil. Stir to get the soil thoroughly wet (but not soupy).
- Sprinkle on a layer of seed, not too thick but enough to cover the soil surface well.
- Cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil.
- Water again using the spray bottles.
- Put the containers on a sunny window sill or other sunny spot.
- Water the gardens twice per day (more if they seem to be drying out. Moisture is the key to sprouting). Light, frequent watering is essential. Using the spray bottles will prevent flooding the seeds or dislodging them.
- Keep your grass seeds warm and moist. In about a week you will begin to see sprouting.

Use your grass to enhance the pretend farm play. Children can “mow” the grass with scissors when it grows long enough.
**Big Red Barn by Margaret Wise Brown**

**Presentation Notes:** A day on the farm is described simply, yet beautifully in this rhyming picture book. Encourage children to make animal sounds with you. Have children watch and listen for clues that will help them identify when the action takes place: morning, noon or night.

**Skills Featured:** Phonological Awareness, Narrative

**Cock a Doodle Doo: Barnyard Hullabaloo by Giles Andreae**

**Presentation Notes:** Short poems and bold illustrations introduce all the animals on the farm. As you read, make sure to emphasize the rhythm and rhyme. Before reading each poem, introduce the animal and ask children for suggestions about what that animal likes and dislikes. Have the children listen to the poem to see if their guesses are the same as those in the book.

**Skills Featured:** Phonological Awareness, Narrative, Vocabulary

**Punk Farm by Jarrett Krosoczka**

This is no ordinary farm book! Here the animals are rock stars and you can be a rock star too when you read it aloud. Invite children to play “air guitar” as they join you in this non-traditional version of “Old MacDonald.” Introduce new musical vocabulary words such as “keyboards.” Ask children to tell you their theories as to why all the animals are sleeping at the end of the book.

**Skills Featured:** Print Motivation, Vocabulary, Phonological Awareness

**The Cow that Laid an Egg by Andy Cutbill**

This fun story about a cow that longs to be special is full of expressive, rich vocabulary. Use this opportunity to talk to the children about how they would define expressions like “down in the dumps” or words like “commotion.” When the font changes, run your fingers underneath the text to help children make the connection between the words on the page and what they are hearing you say.

**Skills Featured:** Print Awareness, Vocabulary
Old MacDonald had a Farm

This classic song is made for participation! Invite children to join in singing, making animal noises and even looking for the animals as you turn the wheel in the book. After story time is over, leave this book out for the children to explore on their own. Books with moveable parts are especially engaging for children.

Skills Featured: Phonological Awareness, Print Motivation

On the Farm by Anna Milbourne

Presentation Notes: Life is busy on a farm. As the text suggests on the first page, ask children to take a moment to imagine what it would be like to live on a farm. After reading, go back through the book and with the help of your group make a list of all the things the children are doing in the illustrations. Then ask children about the things they do in their day and compare.

Skills Featured: Narrative, Vocabulary

MORE GREAT BOOKS!

Punk Farm on Tour by Jarrett Krosoczka

Wake Up Big Barn! By Suzanne Tanner Chitwood

How to Speak Moo! by Deborah Fajerman

Farmer Duck by Martin Waddell

Pigs by Gail Gibbons

Maisy's Morning on the Farm by Lucy Cousins

Rosie's Walk by Pat Hutchins

Hurry! Hurry! by Eve Bunting

Clip-Clop by Nicolas Smee