The Wild, Wild West

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!”

A FASHION STATEMENT

Take a look at some real cowboy/girl items and talk about their use.

**Bandana** - worn over the face to keep from breathing in the dust; or around the neck and used to wipe off sweat and dirt

**Cowboy Hat** - has a wide brim to keep the sun and rain off of the cowboy/girl so s/he could stay cool and dry

**Chaps** - worn over jeans as extra protection from brush and cactus needles when riding

**Boot** - big heels help to keep feet from sliding through stirrups while saddled on a horse; made of leather because it is tough and will serve as protection

**Horseshoe** - nailed on the horses’ hooves for protection, nailing doesn’t hurt the horse (like cutting your fingernails doesn’t hurt you)

**Canteen** - used to hold water while out camping or riding

**Saddle** - horn to hold on to, stirrups for feet and to get on and off

**Horse** - used to ride or pull wagons

**Fence** - used to make corrals to hold the horses

**Rope** - made into a lasso to catch stray horses or cows

**Brand** - put on animals so people would know which ranch and owner the animals belonged to

**Beans** - often cooked over a campfire
WHAT’S MISSING?

After talking about all the cowboy items, play a game.

- Place the cowboy items on the table or floor in front of the children. Ask them to study the objects.
- Cover the objects with a blanket and then use the blanket to pick up and remove one object from the set.
- Ask children to touch their noses when they think they know which object is missing. Once all the children have been given time to think, call on a child to reveal the missing object.
- Add to the number of items if children can easily guess the missing objects.

ART IDEAS

Paint on brown paper bags, sandpaper, or burlap

Bean Collage—Provide different kinds of beans to glue on cardboard using school glue.

Sand Jars in desert colors
Materials needed: Baby food jars with lids
Table salt
Dry tempera
Plastic storage bags
Spoons
1. Color table salt with dry tempera by putting salt and tempera in a storage bag.
2. Shake until salt is completely colored.
3. Spoon salt into jars, one color at a time to make different colored layers.
4. Make sure to fill the jar to the very top.
5. Screw lid on tightly.

Make Bandanas: Decorate or paint on muslin squares (or men’s handkerchiefs) to make western bandanas.
GOOD VIBRATIONS
(Listening for Horses)

Some children may have seen cowboys place their ears to the ground to find out if horses are coming. Explain that sound travels by vibration.

♦ Have children place their hands on their throats and say their name as an example.
♦ Ask the children to place their ears on a tabletop and then you lightly tap the table at the opposite end.

The sound vibrations travel through the table so that they can hear the tapping even at the other end of the table.

HORSING AROUND
Lariat Games

Using a rope as a lariat, lay it out on the floor in a big circle.

In a group, children can:
Gallop around the rope
Jump in and out of the rope with two feet, one foot, backwards, with eyes closed
Hold rope with two hands while standing on the outside of the rope in a circle.

Children can then do exercises together while holding onto the rope: jump in place, touch toes, raise rope up high, walk to the right in a circle, change directions, etc.
COWBOY FUN

For dramatic play, make a pretend campfire (sticks, logs, rolled up newspaper). Children can sit around the “fire” and sing western songs. If you have a guitar let them strum along. Or how about stirring up some beans in a pot over the fire?

Cowboys liked to play cards.
♦ Use the enclosed cards to play games such as Go Fish or Memory. (instructions enclosed)
♦ Sort or match by color, number, or suit.
♦ Toss into a cowboy hat (or any other hat).

COWBOY COOKING

*Make some delicious CORNBREAD with your cowboys and cowgirls:

1¼ c flour
¾ c yellow corn meal
¼ c sugar
2 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt (optional)
1 c milk
¼ c vegetable oil
1 egg, beaten

Directions:
1. Heat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Grease and 8 or 9 inch pan.
3. Combine dry ingredients.
4. Stir in milk, oil, and egg, mixing just until dry ingredients are moistened.
5. Pour batter into prepared pan.
6. Bake 20 to 25 minutes or until light golden brown.
7. Serve warm.

* All cooking projects require adult supervision.
Bring books to life with these simple ideas that highlight early literacy skills.

**She’ll Be Coming Round The Mountain**  
by Philemon Sturges

**Presentation Notes:**  
Enjoy the rich language and the anticipation of a guest coming to visit in this sing along story. Listen to a recording of the folk song. Introduce new vocabulary such as piñata, salsa, reception, fiesta grande, samba, etc.

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

**Magic Boots** by Scott Emerson

**Presentation Notes:**  
Imagination is the best magic of all in this enchanting story. Talk to the children about where they would go if they had magic boots. Make a boot shape out of paper for each child and record their ideas. To build print awareness, point out the large letter at the beginning of each paragraph.

**Skills Featured:**  
Print Awareness, Narrative

**Clarence Goes Out West and Meets a Purple Horse** by Jean Ekman Adams

**Presentation Notes:**  
When Clarence the pig leaves the city for a vacation out west, he feels excited but a little homesick too. Ask the children if they’ve ever felt homesick or sad and discuss how they dealt with it. Encourage the children to talk about the many adventures of Clarence and his new friend, Smoky to help develop narrative skills.

**Skills Featured:** Narrative

**B is for Buckaroo: a Cowboy Alphabet**  
by Louise Doak & Gleaves Whitney

**Presentation Notes:**  
Alphabet books are a great way to expose children to letters. This one features rhyming text to introduce cowboy terminology and customs. Separate entries expand on these concepts to give further insight and background on the world of a cowboy.

**Skills Featured:** Vocabulary, Letter Knowledge
Presentation Notes:
Explore the job, clothes and tools of cowboys and cowgirls to introduce new vocabulary. Read this book in several sittings to reinforce the particular aspect of the cowboy lifestyle you are discussing.

Skills Featured: Vocabulary

More Great Books!

Armadillo Rodeo by Jan Brett

The Three Little Javelinas by Susan Lowell

Buster goes to Cowboy Camp by Denise Fleming

The Cowboy and the Black-Eyed pea by Tony Johnston

Jack and the Giant: A Story Full of Beans by Jim Harris