



Variations and Extended Learning Literacy Adventure:

Let's Write with Ants!

Language Experience Approach (LEA)

Aventura de alfabetización: ¡Escribamos sobre las hormigas!

Age Range: K + up

Group Size: flexible

Time Range: 45-90 min



Try any of these research-supported tips for engaging participants of various ages, cultures, languages, and abilities and for shortening or extending activities to suit the needs of your program schedule.



Key Elements and Strategies for Any K-3 Literacy Adventure

Key Elements:

Every literacy adventure should include these fundamental, [research-based](#) elements to foster literacy development. Detailed tips and strategies can be found in the document [Key Elements and Key Strategies](#).

- Read aloud
- Book browsing and choice
- Nurture diversity
- Draw connections
- Have fun!

Key Strategies

These key strategies will help you implement an activity rich in literacy skill-building.

- Read aloud interactively

- Ask the three VTS questions
- Make time for discussion in pairs
- Extend language
- Nurture diversity in languages

1. Hook: Adventure in Observation

Short on Time?

- Skip the final group share. Introduce the question, model using a prompt, have participants think briefly about their idea, and then have them pair up and share their idea.
- Set a time limit and prompt pairs to switch who is talking with a bell or call and response hand clap.

Variation:

The text you collectively create can simply be a series of photographs or images with captions.

2. Getting Started: Observe, Study, Experience

Short on Time?

- Lead the participants on a guided walk, pointing out what exactly you want them to see.
- Choose a short video clip to watch (1- 2 minutes) or read a few pages in a nonfiction text. This kind of shared experience will be sufficient for the group writing experience.

Variation:

Visit the following sites for short video clips:

- www.arkive.org (ex. [octopus](#))
- www.thekidshouldseethis.com (ex. [ice](#))
- www.wonderopolis.org (ex. [sprouting seeds](#))

3. Adventure: Let's Write!

Short on Time?

- Skip the sticky note activity. It is good to give each child an opportunity to share in their own way, which sometimes means drawing to express themselves instead of talking. However, this is not critical to the task.

- Keep the group writing short—one to two sentences will be fine.

Extending Learning:

- The programmer can give a mini-lesson on a particular skill or strategy about writing (modeling the difference between letter/syllable/word/sentence, writing on the line, complete sentences, main idea and supporting details, etc.)

Variation:

Create a text based on the observation but change the point of view of the “character” to first-person by becoming the “ant” (or leaf, octopus, etc.).

Say: *We just created our own story based on our own observations of the ants. What great observers and writers we are! Now we are going to become the ant and you are going to write about what just happened to you. This is called point of view; it’s when we become the very thing we just observed and we tell the story from his/her perspective, using his/her words. I’ll get us started...*

- Model thinking of and sharing orally the first sentence from the perspective of the ant. E.g. I was walking along the sidewalk and then bumped right into my friend!
- Allow children to laugh and play with the ideas they have about becoming the ant. Have a few of them share out to the whole group.
- When they’re ready they can raise their hand, find their paper and go off to write.

Another variation may be to have clipboards available so children can write while sitting on the floor. They could also go find their caregiver to write together.

Passive Programming Ideas:

- Set up short video clips on a laptop or tablet for children to peruse and then ask them to write about what they observed or experienced. See [Additional Resources](#) for suggested sites.
- Put a collection of items with fine details (E.g. leaves, flowers, shells) and magnifying glasses, invite people to take a closer look and write or draw what they observed. Consider creating a magnifying discovery board: <http://alittlelearningfortwo.blogspot.com/2011/06/magnifier-discovery-board.html>
- Make available pictures and photos of interesting animals, a detailed scene or a series of scenes that might lend themselves to become a writing prompt. Encourage children to write about what they observe in the photos.
- What fun adventures have you been on with your family? Create an interactive board using a map, pins and a small slip of paper to note the location/name and the participant’s name. Write a sentence or two about the adventure and then display for all to read.
- Bring in photos or draw pictures from a summer adventure and...write about it!
- Select a theme (what I eat for breakfast, my family, where I sleep, my pet, etc.) and ask participants to bring in photos (or drawings) to share, compare and write!

Beginning Readers Storytime Integration:

- Share a book based on the adventure (e.g. about ants) to help participants make connections to what they learned in previous sessions.
- After reading, elicit ideas and write a sentence or two (or three) with the group based on the book. Some ideas could include:
 - Three things we learned are...
 - Three questions we have are...
 - Let's change the ending
 - Let's pretend we are different character in the book
 - The best part of the story is when...
 - We like this book because...
 - We didn't like this book because...
 - The author's message
- Be sure to reread what you wrote together and celebrate your great ideas!



Vocabulary

Language Experience Approach: The LEA exemplifies integration of reading & writing, taking advantage of an initial highly comprehensible, shared experience that students then narrate to the teacher, modeling the move from oral language to print.

Translanguaging: Encouraging participants to use their entire language repertoire to discuss and make meaning supports multilingual children's language development, social emotional growth, and affirms their cultural and language identities.

Sentence Prompt (or Stem): A tool when using expressive language (speaking or writing) to help to get an idea going without the added pressure of thinking how to start. Similar to sentence frames, sentence prompts (or stems) are meant to be open-ended to elicit a variety of responses. E.g. "When I saw _____, I thought..."

Scaffolding Talk: Supports designed for communicating ideas, which are particularly important for English language learners. Some scaffolds may include sentence frames, norms for discussions, time for thinking and time to process with a peer.

Mentor Text (Anchor Text): Any text that can be used as an example of good writing for writers and readers.

Choral Reading: A group of voices expressively reading a text in unison. Rehearsal of reading aloud with a group is a great way to practice oral reading and fluency.

Guided Reading: Coaching readers during the reading process to problem-solve as they read a new text. The text should be at the edge of their development. The goal is to support the reader as they work toward reading independently.



Additional Resources

Book Suggestions:

- Hey Little Ant, Phillip Hoose, 1998
- One Hundred Hungry Ants, Elinor J Pinczes, 1993
- Ant Cities, Arthur Dorros, 1987
- Two Bad Ants, Chris Van Allsburg, 1988
- Next to an Ant, Mara Rockliff, 2004
- El camino de la hormiga, Gustavo Roldán
- La hormiga que canta, Laura Devetach & Juan Lima
- Descubre el mundo de las hormigas, Alejandro Algarra Pujante, 2014
- Rosie's Walk, Pat Hutchins, 1967
- El paseo de Rosie, Pat Hutchins (traducido por Alma Flor Ada), 1997
- Diary of a Spider, Doreen Cronin, 2005
- Diary of a Worm, Doreen Cronin, 2003
- El diario de una lombriz, Doreen Cronin

Videos:

Visit the following sites for short video clips:

- www.arkive.org (ex. octopus)
- www.thekidshouldseethis.com (ex. ice)
- www.wonderopolis.org (ex. sprouting seeds)

[The Ants Go Marching](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S_fbCGwOM) video clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S_fbCGwOM



Family Engagement

Messages for Caregivers

Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are questions that can't be answered with one word, like "yes" or "green." Asking kids [open-ended questions](#) helps them develop language as well as critical thinking and communication skills.

Respond positively to kids' early efforts at writing — doesn't need to be perfect yet! Children who are learning to speak don't start out talking perfectly, and we don't expect it -- nor do we expect them to keep quiet until they've mastered all the elements of language! Well, it's the same with writing. As kids experiment with expressing their ideas through writing, they won't start out with perfect skills in grammar, spelling, letter formation, and punctuation. But they will start out with enthusiasm, and we adults can keep that enthusiasm and motivation going by responding positively to children as they experiment with writing their ideas down to share with others.

Connecting reading to real life

Asking kids to connect what they are reading to past experiences, or to people, places, and things they know, increases comprehension and makes reading meaningful.

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) help kids develop verbal literacy through visual literacy

Asking kids what's going on in an image, what they see that makes them say that, and what else they see, are three simple questions that help to stimulate critical thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy.

Supporting Research

- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 1:** Understanding and supporting beginning readers' development of foundational phonics skills supports reading growth and comprehension.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 4:** Gradual release of responsibility is the most effective way to foster comprehension.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 9:** Differences exist in initial literacy progression, English vs. Spanish.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 10:** Stages of emergent writing from oral language to print can differ for (1) monolingual English, (2) monolingual Spanish and, (3) bilingual children.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 11:** Teaching oracy is instrumental to better reading and writing.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 12:** Opportunities for oral language are essential for reading development in the second Language.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 13:** Using Language Experience Approach (LEA) allows for shared and meaningful experiences that connect to print.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 15:** Embracing the multilingual perspective is essential for literacy learning (vs. the monolingual perspective).
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 16:** Children developing biliteracy in the US will draw on all of their linguistic resources when they write.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 17:** Translanguaging acknowledges and utilizes the bilingual child's complex language repertoire as a resource.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 18:** To acquire language children need to be immersed in meaningful and authentic language opportunities.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 19:** Building and incorporating background knowledge aids in engagement.
- **Library Program Models Key Finding 10:** Encouraging joint media engagement between children, caregivers, and educators increases literacy benefits of digital tools
- **Library and Afterschool Program Models Key Finding 17:** Since writing is key to reading/literacy, libraries should offer playful creative writing programming for K-3 kids.
- **Family Outreach & Engagement Key Finding 1:** Reaching out is essential to family engagement.
- **Family Outreach & Engagement Key Finding 3:** Reinforcing actions families can take to support learning is essential to family engagement.
- **Child Social Emotional Development Key Finding 3:** Children learn through play & libraries are apt spaces for children to learn through play.

- **Equity Key Finding 2:** Library is well-positioned to confer public legitimacy on bilingualism/biliteracy (and translanguaging).
- **Equity Key Finding 7:** Latino families from a range of backgrounds have a preference for activities that build and maintain cohesion within the family.