

A collection of preschool supplies including markers, glue, dice, and cards. The items are arranged on a white surface. A white semi-transparent rectangle is overlaid in the center, containing the text. The supplies include a Sharpie marker, Elmer's School Glue, Crayola markers, pip-squeaks, dice, and playing cards.

PLAYING PRESCHOOL START UP GUIDE

Playing Preschool

WELCOME TO THE PLAYING PRESCHOOL PROGRAM!

The Playing Preschool program is a 19 unit curriculum designed to introduce children to a variety of learning concepts in a fun and exciting way. This program is play-based, hands-on and designed for at home use.

I am so excited to share with you my knowledge from being a kindergarten and first grade teacher, as well as what I've learned about early childhood education through raising my own children. And as a bonus, my mom, with 20+ years of elementary teaching experience, lent her hand and guidance to creating this program too. How cool is that?

Building this program has been a labor of love for others looking for a simple, play-based curriculum that can be done easily at home.

This program is not time consuming. Each day takes between 30-45 minutes. This program is not worksheets or printables. In fact, I don't use any of those! This program is not going to cost you an arm and a leg to set up. Most supplies needed for this program can already be found in your house.

Here's what this program is:

It's 19 units of simple, engaging, and active play-based learning. Each unit spans 2 weeks (10 learning days) for a total of 190 days of activities. And that's what this is: educational activities, full of learning but without the pressure or length of typical school. Plus, there's a clear sequence and progression of skills in this program so as children grow and develop, so do the activities.

Through the use of read alouds, simple activities, and play, the Playing Preschool program is designed to help children grow and learn in a fun, interactive, and developmentally appropriate way.

This start-up document was created to empower you as the parent to better understand this program, the hows and whys, and to provide teaching tips to help you become a great at-home educator. There are so many tips and tricks for using Playing Preschool in this document. I can't wait for you to dive in!

Enjoy this program and the special time with your little learner. It's an amazing time in their life as the world begins to unlock around them.

All the best,
Susie

Program Overview

If you're anything like me, you need to see the big picture before things can shrink down to the nitty gritty details. Here's what the Playing Preschool program looks like as the "year" progresses.

Remember that each unit is TWO WEEKS LONG. The program is 38 weeks/190 days which is similar to a traditional school year.

	Unit Theme	Focus Letter(s)
Unit 1	Apples	A
Unit 2	Colors	R
Unit 3	Nursery Rhyme	N
Unit 4	Clothing	C J
Unit 5	Food	M
Unit 6	5 Senses	S
Unit 7	Teddy Bears	B
Unit 8	Things That Go Together	Q U
Unit 9	Community Helpers	H
Unit 10	Transportation	T

	Unit Theme	Focus Letter(s)
Unit 11	On the Farm	F
Unit 12	Weather	W K
Unit 13	Eggs	E
Unit 14	Plants	P L
Unit 15	Construction	Y Z
Unit 16	Pets	D
Unit 17	Opposites	O X
Unit 18	Fairy Tales	G V
Unit 19	Water	I

Where to Start

I know from my years as a teacher how daunting it is to start a new program. So let's take a very Maria von Trapp approach and start at the very beginning. **In this section, I will show you how to get this program started.**

GLANCE AT THE UNIT OVERVIEW

Give yourself a few minutes to check out how the program looks as a whole. Notice the different themes. Each theme is 2 weeks long with a letter (or two) as a focus, along with guiding questions to drive your child's learning. We'll talk more about those questions in a minute.

TAKE A LOOK AT A SINGLE UNIT

The program is broken down by theme. Each theme/unit is two weeks long. Take a little scavenger hunt and find these features in a single unit:

- Supply list
- Books to read (usually 6 books)
- Poem
- Song
- Goals for the unit
- Guiding questions
- Weekly overview (there's one for each week of the theme)
- Daily lesson plan (there are 10 of these for each unit)

Pets

Welcome to the Pets unit! This unit is designed to get kids thinking about ways to classify animals. It is also intended to help them think about how to care for another living thing.

Even if your family doesn't have a pet, this unit is still a fun way to introduce the concept of pets. Consider taking a field trip to a friend's house who has a pet. Interview them; ask question about how they care for their pet and look for the supplies they need.

In this unit, your main supply will be pet stuffed animals and plastic animals that are pets. Talk to a friend and borrow some if you need more.

Supplies

- Plastic animals (pets)
- Stuffed animals (pets)
- Washable Paint
- White construction paper or white board
- Muffin Tin
- 2 lbs uncooked rice
- Goldfish Crackers (regular and rainbow)
- Dice
- Dry erase marker
- Paper Plates
- String
- Sharpie marker
- Storage container
- Empty egg cartons
- Cookie sheet

Books

Each book in this unit has a pet theme. Can't find one from this list? Look for any books about different pets or caring for pets.

- [What Pet Should I Get?](#)
- [But No Elephants!](#)
- [My Pets](#)
- [Some Pets](#)
- [How Do Dinosaurs Love Their Dogs?](#)
- [Strictly No Elephants!](#)

Pets week 1

Questions for the Week:
What kinds of animals are pets?
How do we care for pets?

Goals: Children will learn more about animals that are kept as household pets with a focus on how to care for those animals.

	Monday (reading & sorting)	Tuesday (lettername & numbers)	Wednesday (reading & measurement)	Thursday (lettername & numbers)	Friday (recall & retell & shapes)
Read Aloud	<u>What Pet Should I Get?</u>	<u>What Pet Should I Get?</u>	<u>But No Elephants!</u>	<u>But No Elephants!</u>	<u>My Pets</u>
Things to Talk About	Picture walk-what is this book about?	Introduce letter Dd for dogs. Find the letter Dd in the book.	Picture walk-what is this book about?	Review letter Dd for dogs. Find the letter Dd in the book.	Recall and retell different types of pets
Learning Activity	Sort: Sort toy animals by "pets" and "not pets", then size, color.	Alphabet Hunt: Find the letter Dd on food labels.	Math: measure how tall pet animals are using Legos.	Math: Play more than, less than with Goldfish.	Math: Make shape pets using paper plates.
Easy Activity	Sensory: Hide the pets (muffin tin and rice activity).	Math: math - joining groups of Goldfish together.	Art: Decorate a box as a "pet corner".	Dramatic Play: Set up a vets office with supplies.	Gross Motor: Walk the pet under a table.

Monday

Opening
Morning calendar/routine
Song & Poem

Introduce the Topic
"What is a pet?" "What pets do you know?"
"We are going to be learning about pets this week!"

Read Aloud
Do a picture walk through the book and first look at pictures only. Emphasize making predictions- "What do we think this book is about?"
Read [What Pet Should I Get?](#)

Things to Talk About
Ask your child to make predictions as you read - to guess what's happening. Talk about pets- what are pets? Are all animals pets?

Learning Activity - Sorting Animals
In this activity, your child will sort animals.
The goal of this activity is to call out that not all animals are pets. Gather animal toys (puzzle pieces, bath toys, stuffed animals) to sort by pet or not pet.
As your child sorts, talk about animals that are pets (what do they need?) and talk about animals that are not pets (why can't an elephant be a pet?).

Easy Activity - Hide the Pets
For this fun sensory activity, your child will bury toy animals in rice.
Lay down a beach towel. In a storage bin, set one muffin tin and a container of rice. Set one pet toy animal in each tin. Give your child a scoop and ask them to hide the pets under rice.

Week 1

Where to Start

HOW WILL YOU VIEW THE PROGRAM?

The first and probably biggest question you need to answer is “How am I going to read these lessons?” By that, I mean – are you going to print this program out or keep it on your computer/iPad/other device? FYI, there are lots of color photos and hyperlinks in this program.

If you print out the program, please note: Each unit is about 15 pages long. I took this down to a print shop and they printed, bound, and made my program look lovely for **about \$40**. This was for the FULL 332 page program with this Start Up Guide. **REMEMBER TO PRINT IN BLACK AND WHITE** if you go this route.

THE SUPPLIES YOU NEED TO OWN

There are a few supplies you should have on hand to make this program run smoothly. I'm not trying to play favorites, but I do have a few favorite supplies that repeat in almost every unit.

Here are the most used supplies. Each unit has a variety of supplies needed, usually household items (like a muffin tin or small bowls). This list is the supplies that repeat *most* throughout the program. *Having them on hand from the very beginning will set you up for loads of success:*

- Small white board or white construction paper
- Colored construction paper
- Flashlight
- Post-it Notes
- Dot stickers
- Washable tempera paint
- Pom pom balls
- Cotton balls
- 31 quart storage container (for sensory bins – this size is my favorite)
- 2 lb bag of uncooked rice
- Deck of playing cards
- Dice
- Dry erase marker
- Large sharpie marker
- Roll of Kraft or butcher paper
- Painter's tape or masking tape

How to “Read” a Unit

LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE UNITS

One of the hardest parts of learning a new program is figuring out how to “read” it: learning the language of the program, the features, the look-fors, and what the kids will actually be learning.

In this section, I will explain how to “read” a unit.

THE ROUTINE OF EACH UNIT

The beauty of this program is its deep roots in *routine*. Routine is so important, both for kids and parents. Each day/unit follows a predictable pattern. Once you have completed Unit 1, you will see the patterns/routines repeat in Unit 2. Think of what a pro you will be by Unit 7!

THE WEEKLY ROUTINES

Each day is built around two learning skills (we will expand on these skills later in a few pages).

MONDAY – Predicting and Sorting

TUESDAY – Letter Naming and Numbers

WEDNESDAY – Predicting and Measuring

THURSDAY – Letter Naming and Numbers

FRIDAY – Recall/Retell, Shapes and Letter Review

You can know that every Monday from Unit 1 to Unit 19, you and your child will work on *predicting* and on *sorting*. Routine is powerful and you’ll be able to rely on the repetition of this program to help you grow as a teacher while your child grows in their learning.

On the top of each “Weekly Overview”, you will see these skills noted.

Monday (predicting & sorting)	Tuesday (letter name & numbers)	Wednes. (predicting & measurement)	Thursday (letter name & numbers)	Friday (recall & retell & shapes)
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****Please note that Fridays alternate.** Week 1 Friday is “recall & retell & shapes”. Week 2 Friday is “recall & retell & letter review”. This builds in a review of previously learned letters.

How to “Read” a Unit

UNDERSTANDING THE WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Let’s break down a weekly overview. I created these overviews to give you a snapshot at how the week looks. These always helped me as a teacher to see how the week would progress.

QUESTIONS OF THE WEEK:

Guiding questions to ask your child to check for new learning of the theme

GOALS: General goals for the unit and what will be taught

Apples Week 1

Questions for the Week
What are the parts of an apple? How do apples grow?

Goals: Kids will learn about apples, and to identify and tell some parts of an apple, where apples come from, and what we use apples for.

The day’s lessons/activities

	Monday (predicting & sorting)	Tuesday (letter name & numbers)	Wednes. (predicting & measurement)	Thursday (letter name & numbers)	Friday (recall & retell & shapes)
Read Aloud	<u>Apples</u> (by Gail Gibbons)	<u>Apples</u> (by Gail Gibbons)	<u>Ten Apples up on Top</u>	<u>Ten Apples up on Top</u>	<u>Ten Apples up on Top</u>
Things to Talk About	Picture walk / predict book. Talk about apples.	Introduce letter Aa for Apples Find the letter Aa in the book.	Picture walk / predict book. Talk about book.	Reread book – review letter Aa Find the letter Aa in the book.	Recall information about apples.
Learning Activity	Math: Sort apples into three groups	Alphabet Hunt: Flashlight Find the letter Aa.	Math: Compare the apples by size	Math & Art: Stamp apples in groups of 5	Math: what else is shaped like an apple? Walk around house.
Easy Activity	Art: Stamp apples.	Math: Apple count - Counting 1 – 5 with five frame	Art: Make 10 apples up on top – draw face, finger paint 10 apples	Literacy: Find food that starts with Aa in the pantry	Sensory: Apple sauce sensory bin

DAILY LESSONS / ACTIVITIES

Each day has 4 lessons/activities to complete. In total, this should take about 45 minutes (depending on how long your child plays with each activity). At my house, each day is completed while baby is napping.

BUT THIS DOESN’T HAVE TO BE DONE ALL AT ONCE! You could do some in the morning at breakfast, then do the read aloud. Maybe before nap time you do the learning activity and before dinner, the easy activity. **Make this fit for you!**

This page is just a snapshot of what the week will look like. Each lesson is broken down in detail on the Daily Lesson’s page. Make sure to notice the subject of each activity (for example: art or math).

How to “Read” a Unit

UNDERSTANDING THE DAILY LESSONS

Let's look more closely at a daily lesson.

OPENING: Start the day with calendar time (see “calendar time” page) and the song/poem for the unit

INTRODUCING THE TOPIC: Begin the lesson with a quick conversation to set up the learning

Monday

Opening

Morning calendar routine
Song & Poem

Introduce the Topic

“What is an apple?” Have a conversation with your child about apples. “What are apples? How do we get apples?”

“We are going to be learning about apples!”

Read Aloud

Do a picture walk through the book and first look at pictures only. Emphasize making predictions – “What do we think this book is about?”
Read Apples by Gail Gibbons

Things to Talk About

Ask your child to make predictions as you read – to guess what’s happening.

Talk more about apples – “How do they grow? Do all apples look the same?”

Learning Activity – Sorting Apples

In this activity, your child will sort apples into groups by color.

Introduce the idea of sorting. “We are going to put these apples into color groups. This is called sorting by color.”

Lay down 3 pieces of construction paper: 1 red, 1 yellow, and 1 green. This will give your child a space to sort onto. Have them sort the apples by color.

Extension: Sort by other attributes, like stem or no stem, sticker or no sticker.

Easy Activity – Apple Stamping

Today, your child will make apple prints.

Cut one apple in half. Investigate the apple with your child. What are the parts of an apple? Help your child identify stem, core, seeds, skin, flesh – they do not need to memorize these vocabulary words (this is just an introduction).

Dip the apple half in paint and stamp it onto a piece of white paper. Repeat as many times as your child likes. Save these apple halves for Thursday.



READ ALOUDS: A themed book to anchor the day

LEARNING ACTIVITY: A meaty lesson that connects to the skill of the day and the theme

EXTENSIONS: Look for extensions built throughout the program to expand concepts, increase challenge or provide additional learning.

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT: More learning conversations to have

EASY ACTIVITY: A simple, often independent activity that reinforces the theme

LOOK FOR HYPERLINKS: Occasionally, I've linked to activities on BusyToddler.com. If you follow the link, you can view the activity as we did it in my house.

How to “Read” a Unit

UNDERSTANDING THE DAILY LESSONS

A Daily Lesson is meant to take between 30-45 minutes. Timing will vary based on age of child, type of lessons/activity, and your daily schedule.

ROUTINE OF EACH DAY

OPENING: Each day should start with some sort of calendar routine. This provides a clear introduction to the learning day. Read more about my opening routine on the “Morning Calendar” page.

SONG/POEM: Songs and poems are so important to future reading skills. They are also a great way to begin a day. Each unit has a simple song and a simple poem for you to learn with your child. Hang them on the fridge to help you learn the words – you’ll have them memorized in no time during the unit.

INTRODUCING OR REVIEWING THE TOPIC: Start each day by getting your child ready to learn with a little “warm up” conversation about the theme. Use this as a chance to connect the theme to your everyday life, to hear your child’s opinion about the topic, and to set the stage for the day’s learning.

READ ALOUD: The anchor of each theme is the read alouds. Books bring themes and subjects to life. Take time and go slowly through the book each day. In most units, books are read twice in a week to maximize the learning from each book. Learn more about doing a great read aloud on the “Tips for a Dynamite Read Aloud” page.

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT: This is the true teaching part of your day. Here is where you will connect the book you just read to the theme and often, to the learning activity.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES: The meaty activity. These activities typically require some teaching and help develop at least one of the skills of the day. These activities also use interaction and teamwork with parent and child “learning” together.

EASY ACTIVITIES: These are quick and easy activities that align with the theme of the unit as a fun extra way to learn and play. These activities are often independent (but supervised) and are open ended.

The Skills

WHAT WILL YOUR CHILD LEARN?

Throughout this program, your child will be learning different skills to help them grow and develop. These skills are important to school readiness and building background knowledge.

The skills targeted in this program are all open-ended. There is no moment of mastery where you move your child on to another skill. These skills grow with a child throughout their life. On the next pages, I'll expand on these skills and how they are taught in the program.

PREDICTING: Children demonstrate an ability to answer questions about a story and what *might* happen.

RECALL & RETELL: Children recall and retell information about a story or topic.

SORTING: Children sort and classify data, information, and objects.

NUMBER SENSE: Children demonstrate an understanding of numbers.

MEASUREMENT: Children use measurement words to show size, height, weight, length and capacity.

SHAPES: Children identify basic 2-dimensional shapes.

ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE: Children show an awareness of letters and sounds.

WHY WERE THESE SKILLS PICKED?

As a former teacher, I have a good idea what background knowledge and information is important to kids being "school ready". I also know that it's simply not realistic to expect kids to master everything and know everything before they enter the classroom.

My job as a parent is to get them ready for classroom learning. When they sit down to sort in Kindergarten, I want my child to have *background knowledge* on what sorting is. I don't need her to be a sorting master; I just want her to be able to unlock past experiences with sorting. "I've done this at home with my Mom!" And suddenly, she feels more confident in the classroom setting. She's ready to learn!

I also wanted to hold back some. My goal was to keep this program simple and attainable – for both kids and parents. I'm not trying to shoot for the moon or make this a 3.5 hour a day program. I want to teach *across the board skills* - achievable skills that are right for this age group AND achievable for parents to teach at home.

The Skills

LET'S BREAK THESE SKILLS DOWN A LITTLE MORE

Remember when I said this program was built on routine? There was method to my madness. By repeatedly touching on these same skills each week, the skills grow and develop within your child.

An activity on number sense in Unit 1 is going to look vastly different than a numbers activity in Unit 19. This is because we are spiraling around on these skills, building them slowly throughout the units. There is a clear sequence and progression of skills.

FINDING THE SKILLS IN EACH LESSON

But when will you teach these skills? How will you know? First, I've clearly labeled them each day – it's my Type A nature to label. But I know you want more than a label so here's where to find each skill, which day it's taught, and a little how/why to teaching it.

PREDICTING

You'll find this skill every Monday and Wednesday as part of your read aloud. Ask your child to predict/guess what the story will be about. Then, throughout the book, have them continue to make predictions.

Tips for teaching predicting:

- Start with the cover of a book: "What do you think this is about?"
- Ask questions as you read: "What do you think will happen next?"
- Ask questions at the end: "What else might happen?"

RECALL & RETELL

This skill is taught every Friday by asking your child to retell information from a story they heard during the week OR about the theme. As an adult, you recall and retell information all the time (like when you tell a friend about an article you read). As this skill builds, children will start to learn to retell stories in sequence.

Tips for teaching recall and retell:

- Ask your child to retell a book: "Can you tell me about this story?"
- Throughout the day, ask them to recall you what they did: "Can you tell me what happened at the park?"
- As this skill grows, start working on sequence: "What happened at the beginning? Middle? End?"

The Skills

FINDING THE SKILLS IN EACH LESSON, continued

SORTING

Every Monday, your child will complete a sorting activity. Sorting is a hugely important skill for reading comprehension AND for math skills later on. When a child sorts, they are making decisions, grouping objects by like attributes, and analyzing information. Sorting may seem simple but it is SO important and it's easy to bring it into everyday life.

Tips for teaching sorting:

- Try sorting in different ways, not just by color, but by size, shape, texture, etc.
- Sort often – “Can you make me two groups?”

ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

Each unit has 1-2 letters as the “focus letter”. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, you'll talk about a specific letter of the alphabet with your child. You'll first show them the letter, talk about what it looks like, and how it sounds.

Mastery is not expected. Together, you'll take a look through the read aloud books and hunt for a specific letter (my kids love getting their ‘hunting fingers’ ready to find our focus letter). During each unit, you will search for that letter around your house: in the pantry, in your book bin, on post-it notes, with flashlights, etc. Remember mastery is not expected.

Your child will also create an **Alphabet Portfolio Page** for each letter. We'll talk more about this in a few pages, but here's the main idea: making a keepsake alphabet book from kid made art.

Week 2 Friday is a letter review in every unit. This is our chance to spiral back and review previously learned letters.

Tips for teaching the alphabet:

- Children learn letters at their own pace. Do not drill letters, introduce them. Mastery is not expected until a child is in Kindergarten.
- Make the focus letter a part of your life. Tape it to the fridge. Talk about it at the grocery store. Integrate it but in a playful, flashcard free sort of way.
- Each unit has one letter focus EXCEPT units 4, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, and 18. These units have TWO letters (one per week). Whenever two letters appear in a week, the letters are “easy” letters – meaning the upper and lower case forms look the same (like Ss and Cc) rather than tricky letters (like Rr or Gg) that look different.

The Skills

FINDING THE SKILLS IN EACH LESSON, continued

NUMBER SENSE

You will do number sense activities every Tuesday and Thursday.

Number sense is a broad term for learning about numbers and counting. That means learning to recognize numbers, counting from memory, and one to one correspondence (which is a fancy way of saying touching and counting / understanding that one object is 1).

In this program, as we build skills, number sense activities will grow in complexity throughout the “school year”. The program begins with counting 1 – 5 and recognizing numbers 1 – 5.

*QUICK NOTE: Even though my children can fluently “count”, these more *basic* lessons are still hugely important for them. Don't dismiss a lesson as too easy. Kids need review, they need reteaching, and they may need instruction in an area that you *think* they have already mastered. The same goes for alphabet knowledge.*

By Unit 19, counting has increased to 1-12 and beyond, children are comparing quantities of numbers and beginning to experiment with joining number groups together. Like I said, this program BUILDS.

Tips for teaching number sense:

- Just because a child can “rote count” (that means to count from memory) doesn't mean they understand that five is 5 of something. Those are different skills.
- One to one correspondence is HUGE. Make sure your child is ALWAYS touching and counting when they count out a group of objects.
- Remember that numbers and counting are developmental and vary from kid to kid. Don't get frustrated, just keep introducing. Keep things light.

MEASUREMENT

Measurement activities will be every Wednesday. This is NOT measuring as in inches and centimeters. This is comparing and noticing size, length, height and capacity (how much can a container hold?).

Tips for teaching measurement:

- Integrate measurement vocabulary words into every day life (short, long, small, medium, large)
- Compare sizes when you can (Which box is bigger? Which toy is smaller?)

The Skills

FINDING THE SKILLS IN EACH LESSON, continued

SHAPES

Week 1 Friday always includes an activity with shapes as the focus. As children grow, they begin to recognize shapes. Learning the names of circles, squares, and triangles as well as some of their attributes (how many sides?) is a big skill. As they grow in this skill, children will learn to recognize shapes in the world around them.

Tips for teaching shapes:

- Remember to keep it simple and focus on the most basic shapes: square, circle, and triangle.
- Whenever you talk about shapes, point out their attributes so your child hears this often (circles are round, squares have 4 points, etc.).
- When you see shapes "in the real world" point them out. Talk about shapes you see at the grocery store, make it a game in the car. Bring shapes into your world.

WHAT OTHER SUBJECTS ARE TAUGHT?

In addition to these skills (which are rooted in reading comprehension, phonics, and math), other subject areas are woven in throughout the program. Each unit will typically feature at least one activity from each of these other subject areas:

- Art activity (both crafts and process/open-ended art)
- Sensory activity
- Science or STEM activity (science, technology, engineering and math)
- Fine motor skills (working on small movements like threading)
- Gross motor skills (working on large movements like jumping)

HOLY MOLY, THAT SOUNDS LIKE A LOT

Now that you've read through all the skills and subjects in this program, I bet it sounds like a lot. Don't worry! The beauty of open ended goals is they can meet the child at the child's level.

Here's a great example: Number sense and "understanding numbers" for a 24 month old might mean they can count to 5. For a kindergartener, this can mean understanding the difference between addition and subtraction.

Open ended skills are where it's at. We can mold and bend skills to fit the child's developmental level.

Tips for Starting a Unit

It's just about time for you to start your first unit. I'm so excited for you and for your child. Time spent together reading and doing some easy activities is always time well spent.

I KNOW IT CAN BE NERVE-RACKING!

I have been a first year teacher. I get what it's like to face a class for the first time and wonder how you're going to pull this off.

Here's the good news. This is just you and your child and you've been their teacher for a long time already (wink). Take the pressure off. It's a book and a few activities. You've got this!

And every day, you'll get better. Every day, you'll be a better teacher and this will start to come more naturally. **Let me give you some of my best tips to set you up for the most success right off the bat.**

GET YOUR SUPPLIES READY

These units are two weeks long, but I like to look ahead. So **Tip #1: Get all the materials ready for TWO units at a time (four weeks total).**

Look at the supply lists, look at the book lists. Try to get a hold of everything early to avoid having to run around last minute. There's nothing worse than getting ready to teach and realizing you're missing supplies (trust me, I've been there...).

Tip #2: The library is your friend! Do you have a library card? You might want to get one. This program is rich with books and books get expensive. Instead of buying books for each unit, check them out from the library. *Make sure to check out TWO units worth of books at a time (see tip #1).*

Can't find a certain book? Good news: most books used in this program are interchangeable with other books in that same theme. This isn't always the case, but most of the time you can substitute a different farm book, for example, from one that I've suggested.

Tip #3: Print out the song & poem. These songs and poems are new to you too! Don't worry about memorizing them ahead of time, learn them as you teach your child.

When I'm teaching a child a poem or song, I follow the "I do/We do" plan. I say the poem or song two or three times, then we do it together.

Tip #4 Read the lesson carefully before hand to wrap your mind around the activities and so you can visualize how the day will flow. This also gives you a second to read any notes I've left, gather extra supplies and prep activities before hand.

Tips for Teaching the Program

I wish I could sit next to you the first few days of this program and just help out, so in the absence of that, **here are some things I just really need you to know.**

SOME OF THE LESSONS “REPEAT”

You'll notice as you start moving through the program that some activities, like counting ones repeat, just using different supplies. That's intentional. Kids LOVE when they know how to do an activity. And every activity is a chance to play and learn. I've repeated lessons on purpose. Trust me from my years of teaching – they won't mind this one bit!

WATCH FOR “FATIGUE”

Keep an eye on your kiddo during learning activities and watch for signs that they are fatiguing, or getting frustrated, or wearing out. Even if they're the world's best letter finder, it can get fatiguing looking for the letter Aa on too many pages in a book. So use “parental judgment”, watch your child, stop activities before they the ship starts to sink.

YOUR KID DOESN'T KNOW YOU CAN'T DRAW

I know you are going to roll your eyes at me the first time you look at a lesson and see the words “draw a _____”. Look, your child doesn't care. They don't. They think you are amazing and whatever you draw them should be hung in a museum by their standards. So buck up, do your best, and know that it's perfect for your child (and no one else will ever see it).

YOU DON'T NEED TO DO THIS ALL AT ONCE

I designed this to be flexible and never intended for it to be rigid. Make the program work for your day. Do the opening and songs during breakfast, read the book and talk about the theme a little later. Do one activity before nap and one activity after nap (during that afternoon purgatory between nap and dinner...).

SET THIS UP WHERE YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE

You don't need a special school room or space in your house to “teach”. I don't have that. We do all our activities in our family room, sitting together on the floor.

REMEMBER THAT CHILDHOOD ISN'T A RACE

I know that we want our kids to be the best. But the best doesn't mean “first to learn”. Best means right for them and at their pace. Remember that this program isn't about mastery but about building a foundation. Good foundations take time. Don't rush.

Tips for a Dynamite Read Aloud

We all know that reading aloud is the single most important way we can help children learn. It's the best activity around.

READ ALOUDS ARE SO IMPORTANT

When you read to a child, you build their vocabulary, improve their communication skills, and increase their overall knowledge.

But how do you get the most out of these read alouds? In this section, I'll give you some tips on making the most of a read aloud and going from just reading words on a page to making a book into a full blown lesson/activity.

TIP #1: TAKE A LOOK AT THE COVER

Don't rush right into a book! Take the time to read the title, and identify the author and illustrator (when applicable). Examine the cover thoroughly.

TIP #2: TAKE A PICTURE WALK

Taking a picture walk is a great way to "pre-read" a book. It gives your child time to *really* look at the pictures, get acquainted with the book, and notice the little details in the pictures.

TIP #3: MAKE PREDICTIONS

This is such an important skill (it's one of our focus skills!). Ask your child to make guesses about the book. Start at the cover – "What do you think this story is about?" Throughout the story, continue asking for predictions like "What do you think the character will do next?". In rhyming books, guessing the next rhyming word is a great way to predict.

TIP #4: ASK QUESTIONS

Just keep asking, just keep asking... Asking questions as you read helps you check for understanding. This is a big part of reading comprehension (example: I can read a medical text book but I can't comprehend it). Some of my go-to questions when I read to my kids:

- What would you do here?
- How would that make you feel?
- Would you do that?

TIP #5: GET INTO IT

I didn't end up being a famous actor and I'm not going to be in US Weekly. But that doesn't mean I shouldn't win an Oscar for my reading of Green Eggs and Ham. Get into the book – use voices, have passion, be excited. This will translate to how your child (eventually) reads. You want them to read with expression and with fluency someday so model that for them now.

What is a Morning Calendar Routine?

I love starting my day with a morning calendar routine. I loved this as a teacher and I've loved it as a parent. **My kids and I gather around a calendar each morning to start our day. It's the perfect way to start learning!**

WHAT IS "MORNING CALENDAR"?

"Morning Calendar" means talking about the date, day of the week, month of the year and the weather for the day. You can do this with any calendar, a homemade calendar, or a store-bought kids calendar (which usually come with moving pieces for changing the date).

There is so much learning in morning calendar! In a calendar routine, kids are learning:

- Sequence: the order of the days and months
- Vocabulary: weather words, date words
- Ordinal numbers: first, second, third
- Counting on by one each day
- Recognizing numbers 1 – 31

HOW MY CALENDAR ROUTINE LOOKS

I love my calendar routine and the simple songs my kids and I sing as we talk about the day's date and the weather. It takes about 2 minutes to complete.

My kids sit with me and we talk about the date. *"Today is Monday, February 27, 2017."* We also talk about the days of the week: *"Yesterday was Sunday. Today is Monday. Tomorrow is Tuesday."* Then we look outside and check the weather. *"What's the weather like today?"*

Here's a link to my video: [MORNING CALENDAR ROUTINE](#) so you can see me in action!

On the following page, I've written out the songs we sing during our routine so you can learn the words/tune.

Morning Calendar doesn't need to be daunting! It's just a fun, simple way to begin the "school day" and also hit the learning ground running.

What is a Morning Calendar Routine?

Don't forget to check out my [MORNING CALENDAR ROUTINE](#) so you can see me in action and hear these songs (and my stunning siren song voice).

MONTHS OF THE YEAR

(author unknown)

January, February, March and April
May
June
July and August
September, October, November, December
The 12 months of the year!

DAYS OF THE WEEK

(author unknown)

To the tune of the "Addams Family"

Days of the week
Days of the week
Days of the week, Days of the week, days of the week
There's Sunday and there's Monday,
There's Tuesday and there's Wednesday
There's Thursday and there's Friday
And then there's Saturday.
Days of the week
Days of the week
Days of the week, Days of the week, days of the week

THE WEATHER SONG

(author unknown)

To the tune of "London Bridge"

What's the weather like today?
Like today, like today
What's the weather like today?
Tell me [insert child's name].

The Alphabet Portfolio

INFORMATION ON THE ALPHABET PORTFOLIO PAGES

Back when I was a teacher, one of my favorite keepsakes to give parents at the end of the year was a portfolio of art work. It was so special to both the kids and the parents.

I wanted to recreate that fun with an at-home model – so for this program, your child will make an **Alphabet Portfolio** throughout the “school year”.

The Alphabet Portfolio pages are easy letter-themed art activities. I did break my no printables rule and included all 26 letters so you can print them out for those art activities.

A few tips with the Alphabet Portfolio:

1. Each of the alphabet sheets is at the end of the unit it “goes” with. Simply print it off, either with the unit lesson plans OR when you need it.
2. Once your child finishes their letter, you’ll want to cut it out and glue it to construction paper to help preserve it.
3. You DEFINITELY want somewhere safe to store each page. Consider a simple ½ inch three ring binder: Add each alphabet page as your child finishes it and by the end of the program, what an amazing homemade alphabet book and keepsake your child will have!
4. You also might want to buy clear sleeves for the pages to slide into as some pages will be 3D with supplies glued to them. This will also protect the pages over time.



Examples of the Alphabet Portfolio pages

It's Time!

GET READY TO GET LEARNING!

It's time to start the program! I'm so excited for you and your little "student" to head down this fun road together.

Promise me one thing: cut yourself a lot of slack as you start. You're new to this, your child is new to this. Everyone needs some time to get into the swing of things!

As you grow as a teacher, presenting lessons and activities will become second nature. As they complete more and more activities, your child will also become an old pro at doing these activities. Everything will start to run more smoothly.

YOU'VE GOT THIS!

But in case you don't – I'm here for you always! Send me an email at susie@busytoddler.com. I'll write back as quickly as I can, and probably during nap time.

GOOD LUCK AND HAPPY LEARNING!

~Susie