

M is for Messy

JOY FUL

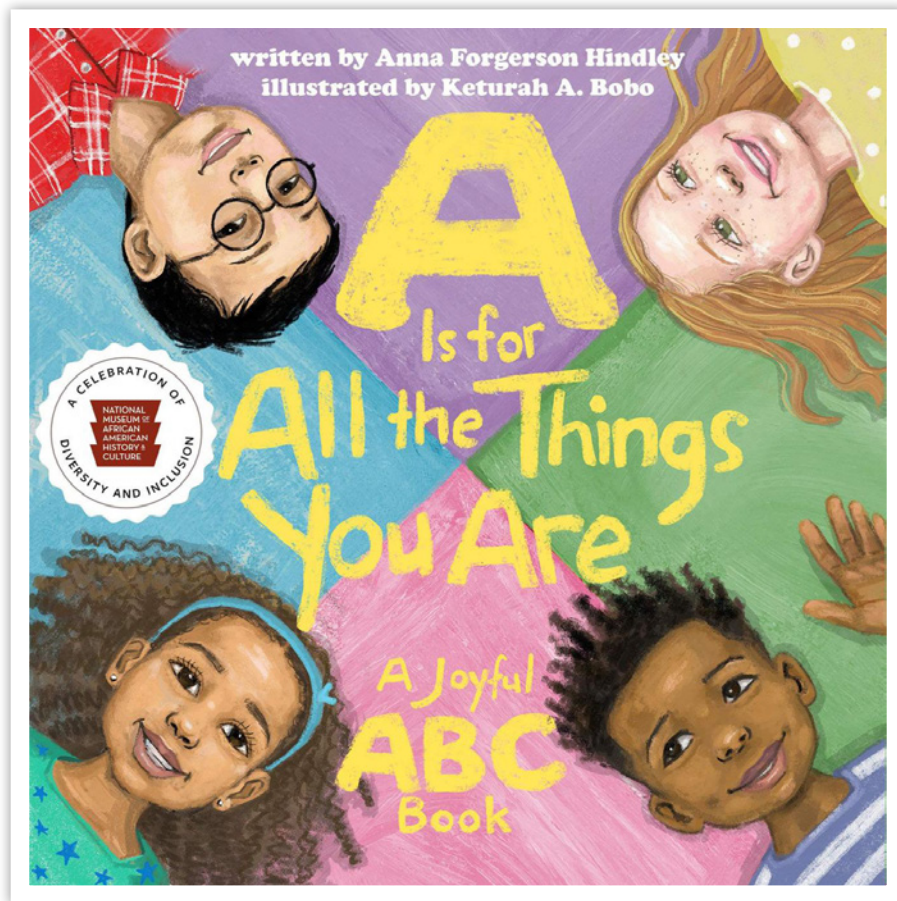


A NMAAHC KIDS ABCs ACTIVITY BOOK

INFANT AND TODDLER EDITION

Brought to you by the National Museum of African American History and Culture Early Childhood Education Initiative.
Inspired by the children's book, A is for All The Things You Are: A Joyful ABC Book written by Anna Forgerson Hindley
and illustrated by Keturah A. Bobo, ©2018 Art by Keturah Ariel LLC.

Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



A is for All the Things You Are was written to affirm our children and empower them to see themselves as many things at once – daring and loving, creative and just, amazing and zany – and everything in between. The book offers wonderful opportunities for conversations with children to build their vocabularies, strengthen their sense of self and deepen their joy in and acceptance of human diversity. The illustrations allow them to see not only themselves, but others in the same positive light. By seeing positive images of children of different colors, genders, abilities, classes, and other social identities, we nurture the child's comfort and joy in human diversity so deep caring connections can be made across humanity.

Each activity booklet offers suggestions of how to begin the lifelong work of having a positive sense of self and others with your infant or toddler, how to support their language development and how to build the foundations of literacy.

A Is for All the Things You Are: A Joyful ABC Book
© 2018 Art by Keturah Ariel LLC (artwork)
© 2018 Smithsonian Institution (text)

M is for Messy:

Some days are easy: Everything falls into place and you shine. Some days are messy: You forget to brush your teeth. You fight with your friend. Nothing goes right. Being messy is okay. It just shows you have new things to learn and new ways to grow.

What makes you feel better when things are messy?

For young children, every day is an experiment in trying new things, figuring out their bodies and feelings, feeding their curiosity, and finding out if they are valued regardless of how their experiments in life turn out. Every day brings new challenges and also, lessons in the fact that what they knew how to do yesterday may not work for them today. Building up a child's belief in their own value, even when things go wrong, is essential to a life where difficult, hurtful or disappointing situations are inevitable. It's important that we let children know they can try again. Give them words to help them through a messy moment: *"It's OK to feel sad and frustrated. I know you can do this when you are ready."*

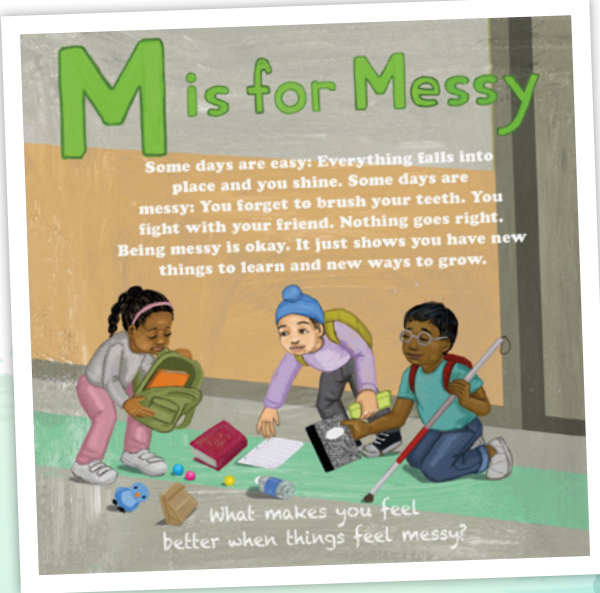
This doesn't mean that adults need to say that *anything* a child does is acceptable. Instead, this is an opportunity to see children through an empathetic and understanding lens. If we can see their messy, awkward moments as part of their learning - rather than as behavior problems or failures - we can help them build the resilience to move forward and keep figuring out new ways to do things.

Remember to see your own path as a caregiver as a learning process with inevitable messy mistakes from which *you* can learn and grow too. Let children's resilience, playfulness and creativity be evidence of the importance of getting messy sometimes, a reminder to laugh, and encouragement that tomorrow we can all try again.

What You'll Need:

The following supplies are suggested for the experiences in this booklet.

- Tape
- Paper
- Blocks
- Plastic cups
- Soft toy balls
- Small towel or scarf
- Small cardboard boxes and tubes
- Edible finger paints (store-bought or [homemade](#))
- Plastic whisk or pasta spoon
- Baking sheet (optional)



A Is for All the Things You Are: A Joyful ABC Book
© 2018 Art by Keturah Ariel LLC (artwork)
© 2018 Smithsonian Institution (text)



EXPLORE

Explore this week's theme with your infant or toddler by trying this engaging experience inspired by our museum collection.

Messy Art: Edible Finger Painting

Designed for: Infants and Toddlers

What You'll Need

- White paper and tape (or baking sheet)
- Edible finger paints (store-bought or homemade)
- Plastic whisk or pasta spoon

The way that babies and toddlers navigate their world is messy. Bathtimes include splashing. Meals include splattering. Diaper changes include wiggling. The way that they *don't* do things neatly, lie motionless or move smoothly can be a challenge for adults. However, if we choose to join in on the playful, experimental energy of the child, we'll soon recognize that this is how children explore the world, learn and build competence - and we get to be a part of that! While it's important that we provide guidance and boundaries as little ones grow, we can also provide opportunities for them to experiment in their own unique and developmentally appropriate ways.

Create a messy masterpiece. Make “paints” for your baby or toddler by making mouth-safe finger paint. Consider creating a simple set of red, yellow and blue edible paint to allow your little one to mix more colors (like brown, orange, purple and green) on their own. Then, try this:

Tape a piece of paper on a highchair tray or tabletop and invite your little one to spread the paints on the paper with their hands. Then, give them an interesting tool like a plastic whisk or pasta serving spoon. Describe the patterns they make with excitement!

For creations made on a baking sheet or tabletop surface, make a “print” of the end result by pressing a piece of paper on the finished product and then hanging it up to dry.



Some Clouds Are Darker by Juan Logan

Tip:

Place edible paints inside a large, sealed zip lock bag. Secure it to a flat surface like the floor or a table with tape and invite your child to push on, squish and mix the paint around inside.

EXPLORE

In early childhood, children learn best through doing! To explore this week's theme, try the experience below with your toddler.

Messy Play: Building Up & Toppling Down

What You'll Need

- Blocks
- Plastic cups
- Small cardboard boxes and tubes
- Soft toy balls
- Small towel or scarf

Down! Boom! Look! Knocking down or tipping over things are behaviors we adults often consider “messy.” However, little ones love and learn so much from experiences like these. Watching a tower of blocks topple or tipping over a bin of toys teaches a baby or toddler concepts like cause and effect, develops their hand-eye coordination and grows their problem-solving skills. These are beginning lessons in *“I can do it! I can make things happen! I can.”* A sense of agency grows from meaningful, messy play.

Set up play time where little ones can safely experiment with building up and knocking down to support their natural learning style and curiosity. Try this:

- Stack child-safe blocks or small cardboard boxes to create a tower together. Then, invite the child to push it over with their hands. Share your laughter. Build it again and encourage your little one to use a small towel to hit the tower: *Wow! Look what you did. Now let's build it again!*
- Arrange plastic cups or cardboard tubes like bowling pins. Then, invite your child to roll or lightly toss a ball at the items.

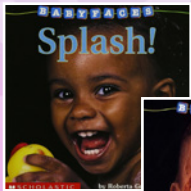


EXPLORE MORE

Continue learning with your little one using these recommended resources:

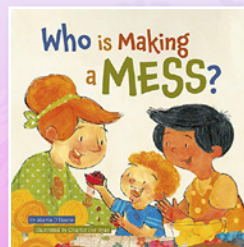
Books

The books below remind us that messy days are a part of life!



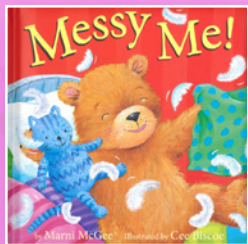
Splash! and Eat!

by Roberta Grobel Intrater



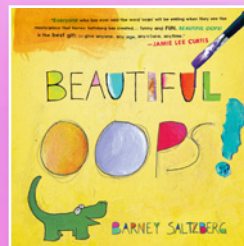
Who Is Making A Mess?

by Maria D'Haene,
illustrated by Charlie Eve Ryan



Messy Me!

by Marni McGee,
illustrated by Cee Biscoe



Beautiful Oops!

by Barney Saltzberg

Tip:

Use your favorite search engine to find read-aloud videos online!

Online Resources

Getting messy has its benefits! Learn how this natural learning style contributes to a child's development of essential skills.

★ [Five Surprising Ways Your Child Learns Through Destructive Play](#) - **LEGO**
Messy play is more than just fun - it's important developmental work!

★ [The Value of Messy Play for Kids](#) - **Tinkergarten**

★ [Learning from Mistakes: Helping Kids See the Good Side of Getting Things Wrong](#) - **Roots of Action**

While being messy doesn't mean you've made a mistake, sometimes mistakes are moments where we "mess up" and learn something important. Read about another benefit of messy moments!

CONNECT

A Guide for Families and Caregivers

Why do these experiences matter?

A child's identity is both internally constructed and externally imposed. They learn who they are and how they are valued from the words and actions of others and from the way they do or don't make sense of those messages. Their beloved adults (that's you!) are the most important people in their world. The words you give a child to describe themselves and others have lasting power in their lives. When a child has the words to think about their strengths and their worth, they can sort through negative messages and hold on to their sense of being loveable and capable. The experiences in this booklet are invitations for you to use objects, activities and words to support your child's positive identity development, their fascination with how people are both different and the same, and their ability to read emotions and build empathy. In time, experiences like these will also support your child's ability to recognize unfairness or unkindness and to stand up for themselves and others.

What about supporting language development and getting ready to read?

Alphabets, in and of themselves, are not particularly interesting to young children. However, learning letter-filled words to describe the world around them and inside of them (their feelings, experiences and senses) are very interesting to children! Discovering new words, new ways to say things and new ways to think is exciting and essential to a child's literacy and identity development.

In the first three years of life, early language and literacy skills are best learned through everyday moments. The experiences in these booklets invite you to boost your child's literacy through talking, playing and creating together in fun and accessible ways. Some experiences will guide you in helping your infant or toddler "name the universe" with descriptive words for the actions and emotions of themselves and others. Other experiences will encourage you to point out written words and look closely at objects to provide your little one with the beginning connections between the real world, reading and talking.

Every child's path to literacy is different and valid - just like their identity. The experiences in these booklets aim to support you and your child along their unique journey to literacy and a positive sense of self. **Remember to have fun along the way!**

Credits

Objects

- *Some Clouds Are Darker* by Juan Logan, 2010. Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Jonell and Juan Logan, © Juan Logan. [2014.225](#)

Program Photos:

- Doug Sanford, National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2019

Original Artwork

- Bluebird (cover, page 2) © 2018 Art by Keturah Ariel LLC