M is for Messy

JOYFUL

A NMAAHK KIDS ABCs ACTIVITY BOOK
EARLY LEARNERS EDITION - AGES 3 TO 5

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 as well. 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. In exploring ideas such as fairness, kindness, open-mindedness and being vocal, children begin the task of recognizing injustice and knowing how to stand up for themselves and others.

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

Messes are part of our everyday life. Things get spilled, misplaced, dropped and broken, smeared, and ripped. All too often, children internalize the message that a mess makes them bad, a mistake makes them wrong. This sense of ongoing judgment diminishes children’s faith in their own intelligence and worth. However, when we help children understand messes – and messing up – as part of being human, we can empower children to see moments of opportunity, instead of moments of shame. Messes offer children endless possibilities for creativity. What happens if...? What if I ...? How will it sound? Feel? Look? What can this mind and body of mine do? This open-ended, messy process is an important foundation for problem solving and critical thinking.

But what about clean-up? Like everything else children learn, organization and cleaning up messes are learned in small steps. What is possible also depends on the child’s physical and emotional state at that moment. For example, what a child did easily when well rested may be impossible while hungry for dinner. Open-ended questions that include the child’s ideas and capacities are helpful: What can we do with this mess? See the child as “in process,” taking one step backward for every two forward. It helps even more if we can give ourselves the same understanding: Some days I can manage it all. Some days, all I can do is get through. This week, make time for messy play with your child and embrace the messiness of life!

What You’ll Need:

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

- 4 sheets of colored construction paper
- White paper
- Black marker
- Markers and crayons
- Ingredients for [cloud dough](#), [mud pies](#) and [oobleck slime](#)

Tip:

Build an at-home creativity kit full of all the supplies and recycled materials you’ll need for future ABC art and play activities. Find the supplies list [here](#).
EXPLORE

In early childhood, children learn best through doing! Explore this week’s theme with your child by trying this engaging experience inspired by our museum collection.

Discovering Possibilities in Messes

What You’ll Need

- 4 sheets of construction paper in different colors

For children, messes are a way to explore using their senses, create unconventionally, discover cause and effect, engage their motor skills and see the world in many different ways. Messes offer children endless possibilities for building critical thinking skills and creativity, and a sense of their own expanding capacities.

Discover the possibilities messy moments bring. Work together to tear construction paper into pieces ranging in size, from the size of a quarter to the size of a sticky note. Invite your child to gather the ripped pieces of paper into a pile, scoop them up and toss them in the air.

Joyfully watch the pieces fall! Take time for you both to look at the way the pieces fell. How did the pieces land? Describe what you see. What letters, shapes, faces or other images do you see? Then, play a game of “I Spy.”

To play, start by saying something like: I spy a piece on top of another one! Do you see them too? Your turn! What do you spy? Then show each other what you see by pointing or gently touching the pieces. Find creative ways to change the paper arrangement for a new round. Try blowing the paper or fanning it with a book or a piece of cardboard.

Tip:

Play “I Spy” outdoors. Look in the sky for cloud shapes. Discover the natural way the leaves, sticks and rocks make patterns.
Messy art is meaningful. Though random marks and lines quickly drawn on a page may seem unintentional, scribbling is a form of art that allows children to think big, move freely and experiment with materials. When we provide opportunities for children to scribble without restrictive lines, templates or directions (which require a child to get it “right” or be wrong), we are inviting them to practice the precise, exact motions they need in order to eventually write and draw. Scribbling is an important first step in a child’s artistic expression, developing fine motor skills, and learning to see and create the forms that they will need to read and to write.

Before beginning this art project consider finding read-aloud videos of the following books: I Am Not Just A Scribble by Diane Alber and Nola’s Scribbles Save The Day by Christina Lalli.

1. Invite your little one to scribble with a black washable marker. Narrate their movements: You’re drawing up and down. Now, side to side! Can you add any lines that are curvy?

2. Once the page is filled with scribbles, pause and look closely together at the lines. Say: Tell me about your picture! What does this look like to you? What could this be?

3. Now, fill in blank spaces within the scribbles with colors and patterns. Admire your child’s art together and ask them to tell you a story about what they created.
LEARN

Invite your child to take part in the following experiences to support their literacy and language skills.

Explore Vocabulary During Messy Play

Use messy play to build vocabulary. As children use their hands to play with and explore new, messy materials, they feel new textures, use their hands in creative ways and observe the interesting ways that materials move or look. Introduce your child to the homemade doughs and slime below and help them put words to this sensory experience.

- Make cloud dough. Mold the dough into shapes. Use the interesting shapes of Sargent Claude Johnson’s sculpture, Dancer, as inspiration! Describe the shapes you see as you mold the dough with your hands.

- Pretend to bake mud pies! Talk about how the mud feels in your hands. Ask: How does it feel to squeeze the mud? Does the mud feel smooth or lumpy when you hold it?

- Play with oobleck slime. This is a great messy outdoor science experiment with lots of opportunities for cause and effect exploration.

As you play, make up words to describe textures and introduce words like squishy, crumbly, slimy, wet, soft, oozing, lumpy, smooth or stretchy.

Tip:

Some children are uneasy with gooey hands. Have a washcloth and soap nearby so they can see that the goo washes off!
EXPLORE MORE

Continue learning with your little one using these recommended resources:

Books

Read about the beauty and importance of being messy!

- Beautiful Oops! by Barney Saltzberg
- Regina’s Big Mistake by Marissa Moss
- Edward Gets Messy by Rita Meade, illustrated by Olga Stern
- Accident! by Andrea Tsurumi

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

Online Resources

Support your little one in turning mistakes into opportunities for learning and growing.

- Janelle Monae Sings “Power of Yet” - Sesame Street
- Learning From Mistakes - Making Caring Common, Harvard School of Education
- It’s Okay To Make Mistakes - PBS Kids
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.

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.

The developmental path to reading is a child’s understanding that, “Anything I do or see, I can say! Anything I say can be written! Anything written can be read!” Many booklet experiences will encourage you to engage in conversations about objects and during story times to deepen your child’s connection to spoken and written words. Other experiences will invite you to build literacy skills by writing down what your child says, feels or thinks and reading it back to them aloud. Some booklets will introduce fun ways to boost fine motor skills that contribute to a child’s writing and reading abilities. The booklets will also recommend books that intrigue children by illustrating the rich diversity of people in the world and providing them with a mirror to their own lives or a window into other lives.

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

Original Artwork
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