

Prop Box Learning and Play!

“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.”
-Fred Rogers

Prop boxes are used by many Preschool and Kindergarten teachers to create imaginative play and *hands-on-learning opportunities* in their classrooms. Prop boxes are essentially a collection of items (or props) that suggest a specific theme and “set the stage” for a child's imagination to engage in both creative and dramatic play (Prop Boxes, 2020).

Parents and teachers can use **prop boxes** to reinforce:

- Literacy and Math experiences
- Language building opportunities
- Decision making and problem solving
- Social and emotional skills
- Gender and cultural inclusiveness

Prop Boxes are important elements of **Dramatic Play**. Dramatic play is pretend or make-believe play where children use objects and roles in imaginative and realistic ways. Group dramatic play is also called **sociodramatic play**. Sociodramatic play is the most sophisticated form of play for young children as it gives children the opportunity to think, speak and act symbolically (Barbour & Desjean-Perrotta, 2002).

Prop boxes and dramatic play support:

Cognitive Development

- Representation of thoughts using symbolism, a prerequisite skill for reading, writing and math.
- Focus attention and concentration
- Hypothesize, test, and revise concepts
- Use divergent thinking
- Problem-solve
- Understanding economics
- Discover Math and Science concepts (classification, seriation, and measurement)

Social & Emotional Development

- Develop friendships
- Take turns, cooperate, and share
- Listen to others
- Communicate appropriately, both verbally and nonverbally
- Collaborate with peers
- Explore and express feelings freely
- Negotiate, renegotiate, and resolve conflicts

Physical Development

- Fine and Gross Motor skills
- Balance
- Coordination
- Eye-hand coordination
- Flexibility
- Spatial and distance awareness
- Physical competence and security

Language & Literacy Development

- Communicate meaning
- Practice conventional speech
- Emergent reading and writing skills
- Increase vocabulary
- Use language for critical thinking and problem-solving
- Act out stories and role plays that enhance story sequence, story sense, and language use
- Utilize environmental print (labels on food containers, menus, grocery store circulars, etc.)

Creativity

- Express originality in thinking
- Add to and change the environment in their own ways
- Respond to stimuli in unique ways
- Explore and play with ideas
- Develop an experimental attitude
- Develop curiosity (want to know and understand)
- Use divergent thinking and convergent thinking
- Explore with new materials

(Barbour & Desjean-Perrotta, 2002).

Prop Box Learning and Play!

Let's Build a Prop Box!

- What will our theme be?
- What type of box will we use?
- Where will we shop for our prop box materials? *Let's write a list.*
- What can we find around the house or classroom to add to our box?

Prop Box Themes:

- | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| • Archeologist | • Circus | • Post Office |
| • Architect | • Dentist/ Doctor | • Picnic |
| • Bakery | • Farm | • Science Laboratory |
| • Birthday Party | • Fruit and Vegetable Stand | • Space Travel |
| • Camping | • Ice Cream Shop | • Supermarket |
| • Construction | • Pet Shop/ Veterinarian | • Zoo |



Architect Prop Box

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|--|
| • Blueprints | • Ruler | • Colored pencils |
| • Safety vest | • Level | • Cell phone or walkie talkie |
| • Construction hat | • Tape measure | • Pictures of building styles |
| • Safety goggles | • Clipboard | • Books about construction & buildings |
| • Building blocks | | |

New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards:

Approaches to Learning

- Standard 91: Children demonstrate initiative engagement, and persistence.
- Standard 92: Children show creativity and imagination.
- Standard 93: Children identify and solve problems.
- Standard 94: Children apply what they have learned to new situations.

References:

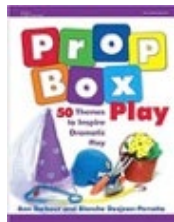
Barbour, A, & Desjean-Perrotta, B. (2002). *Prop Box Play: 50 Themes to Inspire Dramatic Play*. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.

Prop Boxes: Creating Imaginative Play Spaces. (2020). Retrieved from Playful Learning:

<https://www.playfullearning.net/resource/prop-boxes-creating-imaginative-play-spaces/>

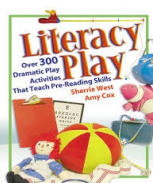
LRC-South related items to borrow that align with this Learn and Create Activity:

Prop Box Play: 50 Themes to Inspire Dramatic Play



Think inside the (prop) box! Encourage more dramatic play with Prop Box Play. Prop boxes contain dramatic play props that offer children the freedom to express themselves and to exercise their imaginations. With 50 themes that inspire hours of dramatic play and creativity, lists of props, easy extensions, related vocabulary, and associated children's literature, Prop Box Play makes it easy for children to bring their imaginations to life! (LRC-S #45403)

Literacy Play: Over 300 Dramatic Play Activities That Teach Pre-Reading Skills



Children love to pretend, and dramatic play is the perfect environment for practicing and applying literacy concepts. Whether they decide to be firefighters, to open a pet store, or to have a tea party, children will increase their vocabulary, communicate with their friends, and learn to recognize environmental print - all important skills for pre-readers. (LRC-S # 45663)

Classroom Mailbox



A great way to boost early printing skills and build community awareness, our tough mailbox has all the authentic features to inspire realistic play—from a working mail door for depositing letters to a flag children can raise when there's mail inside! The mailbox features a sturdy tabletop design with a stable base and rounded edges for super-safe play. (LRC-S #43457)

Transportation Theme Box



Children learn all about transportation...with comprehensive, hands-on lessons that span the curriculum! From vehicle counters and cookie cutters to an engaging puzzle, our theme box is packed with materials that help kids explore cars, boats, trains and more! Plus, you get a guide with tons of involving activities that cover 10 curriculum areas—from math to dramatic play. (LRC-S #37837)

Calculator Cash Register



Kids will love ringing up the fun with this talking cash register. The lights and sounds will engage and entertain. Cash register features interactive games with multiple skill levels that encourage and motivate young learners. (LRC-S #36774)

Dalmatian Vet Set



So many things to do! The Dalmatian Vet Set comes with everything a young veterinarian needs. You can take your puppy's blood pressure, check his reflexes, and even listen to his heart with your very own stethoscope. Also includes a brush, tweezers, syringe, thermometer, dog food, and more. (LRC-S 42415)

Targeted Age Group: 3-5 Year olds

Title: Construction Site Prop Box

Items you'll need:

Different kinds of building blocks
Wooden figures Pictures of building styles
Rulers, level and measuring tape Masking tape
Clipboard and paper, Pencils and colored pencils
Books about constructions and buildings
Tools, PVC pipes, and loose parts
Craft sticks and wood scraps Recycled cardboard



Activity:

Cognitive Development

Representation of thoughts using symbolism, a prerequisite skills for reading, writing and math

Focus attention and concentration

Hypothesize, test, and revise concepts Problem – solve

Discover math and science concepts (sorting, classification, seriation, and measuring)

Language Development

Communicate meaning Practice conventional speech and increase vocabulary

Emergent writing and reading skills

Use language for critical thinking and problem – solving

Act out stories and role plays that enhance story sequence, story sense, and language use Utilize environmental print (brochures, traffic signs)

Creative Development

Express originality in thinking

Explore and play with ideas

Develop curiosity (want to know and understand)

Explore with new materials

Variations:

Hollow blocks

Large recycled cardboard boxes

Magnatiles

Lincoln blocks

Wooden dominoes

Reading/Book List: Construction Books for Kids
Machines at Work. by Byron Barton
Mighty Mighty Construction Site. by Sherri Duskey Rinker
Roadwork. by Sally Sutton
Tip Tip Dig Dig. by Emma Garcia
Digger Man. by Andrea Zimmerman
Rosie Revere, Engineer. by Andrea Beatly
Construction Truck. by Janice Behrens
If I Build a House. by Chris Van Dusen
Young Frank, Architect. by Frank Vita
How a House is Built. by Gail Gibbons
Road Builders. by B. G. Hennessy
Construction Countdown. by K.C. Olson
B is for Bulldozer. by June Sobel and Melissa Iwai
When I Build with Blocks. by Niki Alling
Dreaming Up: A Celebration of Buildings. by Christy Hale
Look at that Building! A First Book of Structures. by Scot Ritchie

Targeted Age Group: 2-5 years

Title: Pet Vet Dramatic Play

Items (you'll need or) included in the box:

- medium size box and mini tri fold cardboard
- mini shower caddy -cotton balls -stethoscope
- craft sticks (tongue depressors)
- Stuffed animals
- clip board, pet medical sheet, pencil
- mini box (for pet patient table)
- Barbie Doctor Veterinarian
- Mini pet coloring books-pet stickers (to put on walls)



- Activity: -The pet vet encourages young children to be empathic and help others who might be feeling a little anxious about their next check-up feel a bit more at ease.
- Children will incorporate their literacy and math skills as they count the cotton balls, tongue dispensers, and the puppy coloring and activity book.
 - Encourage pre-writing and fine-motor skills (writing and drawing) with the medical record sheets. Pictures combined with words help make connections.
 - Encourage working together, taking turns, and role play
 - Children can relate it to their own pets or a family/friend's pet
 - Encourages competence and self-confidence when helping a pet/someone feel better.

- Variations: -Pet grooming service
- Pet daycare
 - Pet indoor playground
 - Petting zoo

Submitted by Viki Palmer, Family Engagement Specialist- Middlesex County

Targeted Age Group: 4 year Olds

Title: Hair/Beauty Salon

Items (you'll need or) included in the box:

combs	brushes	rollers	barrettes
mirrors	towels	capes	hair clips
spray bottles	wigs	wig heads	curling iron
safety scissors		signs	telephone
cash register		play money	
appointment book		posters of hair styles	
price list			

Photo:



Activity: (1) Engage in conversation with children about what they know about hair salons. Create a chart and record their responses.

(2) Read a children's book about hair. Ask open ended questions about the story and the illustrations.

(3) View a video of a 6 year old hair stylist at work - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bek7KWdqLM>

(4) Incorporate math and science concepts:

Math: Counting money, positional words: in/out, open/closed, time

Science: Experiment with how soap reacts to water; temperature

(5) Expand language skills. Introduce and use hair salon vocabulary. Post displays that include print and pictures.

Variations: (1) Expand salon to include nail services

(2) Add barber services

Reading/Book List: Hair/Pelo Amoroso, Cynthia; My Hair Lee, Hannah;
I Love My Hair Tarpley, Natasha; My Hair is Magic Marroquin M.L.; Franny B. Kranny there's A Bird on
Your Head Lerner, Harriet Goldhor; Hair, It's A Family Affair Freeman, Mylo; Crown Barnes, Derrick

Targeted Age Group: 3-4 Year olds

Title: Birthday Party

Items you'll need:

Goodie bags	banner	party hats
spoons	forks	plates
cups	napkins	invitations
gift wrap/bows	gift boxes to wrap	
gift bags		
*items you may add		
Tablecloth	face paint	games



Activity:

Celebrate a special someone with this birthday box. To make the most out of the items, assign different jobs to children to set up for party. Ex. decorator, baker, birthday person.

Have children use the boxes and bags to give out presents to friends and take turns watching each other open them.

Have the children practice setting the table and counting out place settings one by one.

Use play dough to make a cake and candles. Have children set the table and count out place settings (one-to-one correspondence). Plates, utensils, cups and napkins can be used for children to sit down and enjoy "birthday cake".

Variations:

Book Suggestions:

Rabbit's pajama party by Stuart J. Murphy

The Birthday Box by Leslie Patricelli

Birthday Cakes by Sarah Schuette

Llama Llama Birthday Party! by Anna Dewdney

If You Give a Pig a Party by Laura Numeroff

Targeted Age Group: 0 – 12 Months

Title: Welcome New Baby

Items (you'll need or) included in the box:

Books: Waiting for Baby; My New Baby; The New Baby At Your House; My First Book of Baby Signs; Baby Smarts (Games for Playing and Learning); Baby Minds; Making Toys for Infants & Toddlers; Beginning with Babies. Soft Books to read and for baby to engage with: Peek-a-Boo & The Very Hungry Caterpillar. Sensory toys for baby to explore. Toys/Materials with Mirrors Breastfeeding info. Diapers, bottles, pacifier, swaddling blanket

Photo:



Activity: At Home or in Child Care with older sibling/mixed age groups: For families/children expecting sibling - Read and discuss Waiting for Baby. Helps children anticipate, understand, and even participate in the preparation process. When baby arrives, read, and discuss My New Baby and The New Baby at Your House. Helps children engage and bond with new baby and parents and how they can be a helpful big brother or sister as they all go through this period of adjustment. Toys/Books for Baby to engage with: Grasping toys of different sizes and textures helps infants develop their fine motor skills. Ensure objects are safe for babies to put in their mouth like teething rings and pacifiers. Mouthing toys is their way of playing and discovering the world around them. It's normal and shouldn't be discouraged. Materials that make sounds like the ones that squeak or rattle and that they shake are great for babies to learn cause and effect. Other examples include toys they can bang, crinkle, squeeze, etc. They begin to realize that they can make things happen. ASL - Book: My First Book of Baby Signs - For pre-verbal children and you can include the whole family, peers, and teachers. It is a great bonding experience between child and caregivers and their siblings. Reduces frustration for child and caregivers as they try to communicate their needs. Strengthens their language skills and vocabulary base. Increases opportunities for communication. Activity books - i.e., Making Toys for Infants, Brain Building Games etc.

Variations: In Dramatic Play area: Provide baby dolls, bottles, diapers, clothes etc for children to practice taking care of and teach the importance of being careful with baby. For example, it's important to support baby's head as neck muscles are developing and strengthening.

For new moms: information and resources on Breastfeeding; La Leche League Organization.

Targeted Age Group: Young Infant Caregivers

Title: Sensory Play is for Young Infants Too. During Week of the Young Child choose 5 of these activities to engage in with children from birth to nine months. Once you get started it'll be hard to not continue these five sensory activities (and the others included in this prop box) throughout the year. Ready, Set, Go... Explore!

Items (you'll need or) included in the box: Individual idea cards designed to provide early educators of young infants an understanding of what sensory activities look like for children 0 - 9 months, inspire them in planning purposeful sensory activities for these young children, and serve as a "how-to" guide as they develop practical skill in planning and implementing these activities. Each cards describes one activity and its purpose and is meant to guide educators of young infants in exploring new and approaches to sensory play.



Activity: 1. Treasure Baskets are one of the most ingenious sensory play ideas for young infants and takes hardly any time to create. It gives babies who are just months old a chance to explore everyday items. The objects in the basket should ideally be a mixture of different textures, surfaces, sizes, shapes, colors, and smells, but most importantly, safe to babies to touch. 2. Exploring Through Touch, Sight, and Sound: Diaper Changing Babies can also have fun sensory experiences during diaper changing. It is the perfect time for a baby to make eye contact with you. Gently touch the baby's feet and bring them up near the face so the baby can see and feel his/her feet. Rubbing lotion on the baby's legs is another form of gentle touch. Places small circular rattle at the baby's feet to help him/her learn to kick and make noise. 3. Exploring Through Sight: Babies can be lulled into calm or be revved up with different colored lights. Watching colors mix and seeing how light and shadow is created becomes part of the sensory play experience and there are different ways to create this at home. 4. Exploring Through Sound: Talking is important for building a young infant's brain. In the first 3 years of life, a baby's brain triples in size. It also becomes much more complex—and this doesn't just happen without outside help. The brain develops a baby interacts with the world—seeing what will happen when she fusses, giggles, snuggles up to mom, dad, or grandparents, says "mama" or "dada"—or throws the cereal on the floor. Many of your baby's most important experiments are about communicating with parents and other caregivers. Research has shown that lots of talking with children in the first 3 years of life builds the brain architecture that will be needed later to support reading and thinking skills.

Variations: Through regular practice caregivers will develop skill in varying these activities to maintain young infants' interests and learning, and also support their growth and development by scaffolding the activities to achieve the same goals as the children get older.

Unlike traditional prop boxes this prop box is designed for you, the caregiver, for the purpose of generating sensory play ideas for young infants; 0 - 9 months.

Title: **Discovery Box**

Items (you'll need or) included in the box:

- Medium sized box or container with a lid.
- Cut a hole (large enough to put your hand) in the top/lid.
- Several colorful items (i.e., scarves, blocks, socks, ribbons, tennis balls, small stuffed animals).

Photo:



Activity:

- Place several colorful items next to the box.
- Have the child touch and feel the items as you describe them.
- Encourage the child to place the items “IN” the hole in the box.
- Describe the items as the child places them into the hole in the box.
- Remark, while gesturing, “Where did it (the specific item) go? It went “IN” the box.”

Variations:

- Have the child reach into the box filled with items and pull “OUT” the items as you describe each one (i.e., “Oh, I see you found a blue sock.”)

Books:

- What’s in the Box? By Isabel Otter
- Where is Spot? By Eric Hill
- Toddler Hide and Seek by Dawn Sirett