

Emergent Literacy: Fun with Word Comprehension



10 Activities That Help Prepare
Children to Read

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When the Common Core Standards for kindergarten were released, they included the requirement that all children be able to read by the end of that grade. But not one of the committee members determining those standards was an early childhood professional or an expert in child development. Those are the people who would have known forcing a child to read before she or he is ready will only create a frustration leading to a *dislike* of reading. Early childhood expert Jane Healy tells us that when we try to do things before the brain is ready, we've got trouble!

Reading and writing should be considered a developmental continuum; one leads to the other, but not necessarily in a precise sequence that occurs on a child's own timetable. When the time comes for children to read and write, they will be ready!

Word comprehension, of course, is a component of both.

Over & Under



Spatial awareness, as explored here with the concepts of *over* and *under*, is a component of both reading and writing. Moreover, these words are prepositions – little words with big significance!

You'll need a playground ball or small beach ball for this activity.

Invite the children to stand in a line, one behind the other. Hand the ball to the first child, who then passes the ball over his head to the next child. When the ball reaches the end of the line, the children perform an about-face and the child who is now first passes the ball *under* her body (between the legs) to the next child. Continue this as long as the children stay interested!

Over, Under, & More



Create an obstacle course using cardboard boxes, jump ropes, furniture, and so on. Then lead the children through the course, explaining what you're doing. For example, you might say, "Now we are going *under* the rope. Next we'll go *through* the box." (Remember to keep it playful and not obviously instructional!)

Once the children are familiar with the course, make slight changes to it. For instance, if they were previously expected to go under a rope suspended between two piece of furniture, lay the rope flat and direct them to step over it.

Take Your Positions

This word comprehension activity reinforces more challenging positional prepositions, which also fall under the content area of *math* (early geometry).

Place a rope on the floor or create a line with masking tape. Then invite the children to do the following:

- Stand *beside* the line.
- Stand with the line *behind* them.
- Stand with the rope *in front* of them.
- Stand *near* the line.
- Walk *around* the line.
- Walk *toward* the line and then continue walking past it.
- Walk *toward* the line again.
- Stand with the line *between* the feet.
- Stand *on top* of the line.
- Lie *across* the line.

Words in Action: Verbs



Talk to the children about the meanings of the words below and then invite them to act them out.

- Traveling action words: *stomp, sneak, pounce, float, bounce, slither, and stalk*.
- Non-traveling action words: *melt, shake, collapse, shrink, wiggle, spin, shiver, and tremble*.
- Verbs that pause the action: *freeze, pause, flop, drop, and stop*.

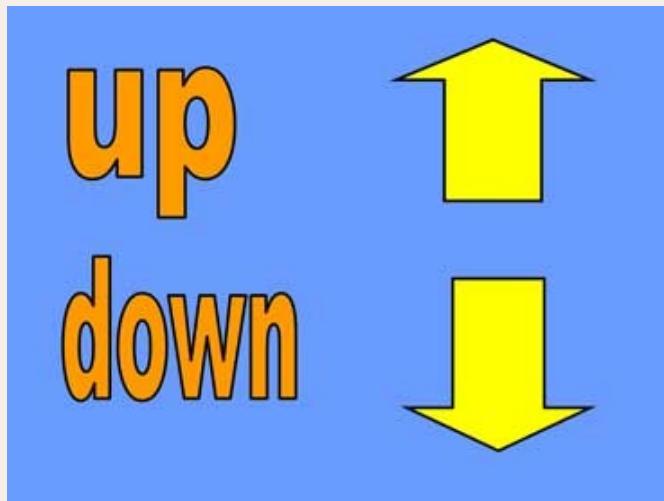
Words in Action II



When the children are ready, step up the challenge by presenting two or more words at a time from the previous , inviting them to demonstrate them together. For example, you might invite them to “stamp and shake.” Even later, invite them to demonstrate three words at a time; for example, “stamp, stop, and shake.”

They can perform as many repetitions of each as they want!

All About Opposites



Invite the children to demonstrate the following words with their body or body parts:

- up/down
- small/large
- long/short
- forward/backward
- happy/sad
- high/low
- front/back
- tiny/enormous
- wide/narrow
- top/bottom

Slow & Fast Words



Ask the children to demonstrate the slow and fast words below, alternating between the two and first discussing the meaning of each.

Slow movements include *stomp*, *trudge*, *meander*, and *sneak*.

Fast words include *hurry*, *fly*, *dash*, *run*, and *scurry*.

All About Adjectives

Invite the children to act out the following words, explaining any that may not be familiar.

- strong
- weak
- graceful
- forceful
- smooth
- droopy
- gentle
- floppy
- careful
- enormous
- tiny
- excited



All About Adverbs

Talk to the children about any words you feel require explanation, then challenge them to do the following:

- Walk lightly.
- Walk heavily.
- Walk slowly.
- Walk quickly.
- Stomp loudly.
- Tiptoe quietly.
- Walk angrily.
- Walk proudly.
- Move swiftly.
- Move tiredly.
- Walk crookedly.
- Walk sadly.
- Walk happily.



Retell Me a Story



Text retelling is the process of retelling a story through varying methods. It helps you gauge the children's progress in word comprehension and in making meaning (understanding the essence of the story). Retelling is done after children listen to a story. One of the methods for retelling is acting out the story.

You'll need a short book with action in it and no more than one or two characters in it.

Read the book to the children, and then invite them to act it out from beginning to end!

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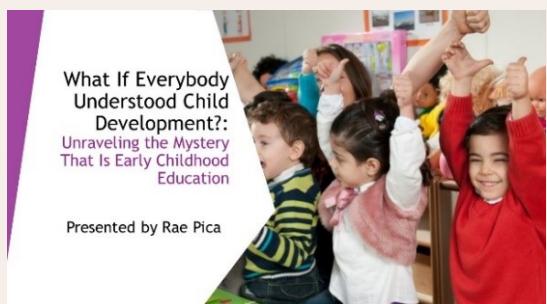
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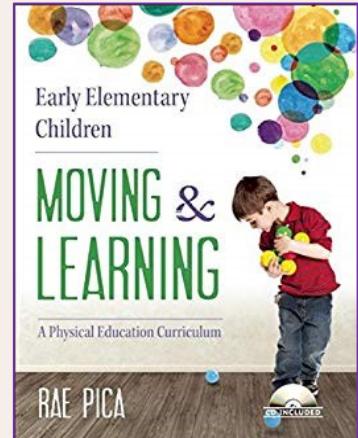
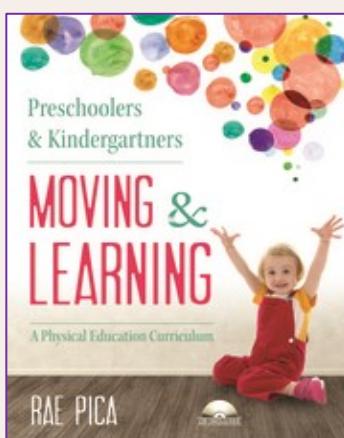
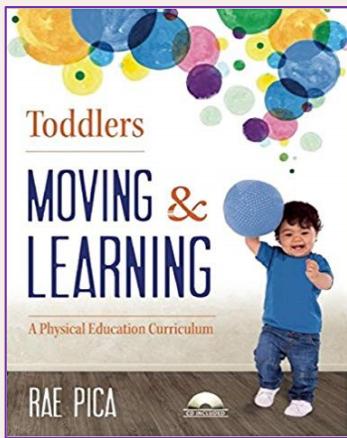
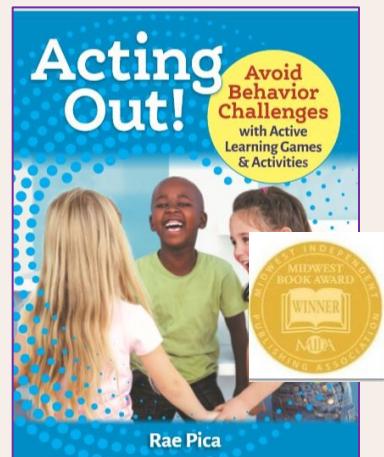
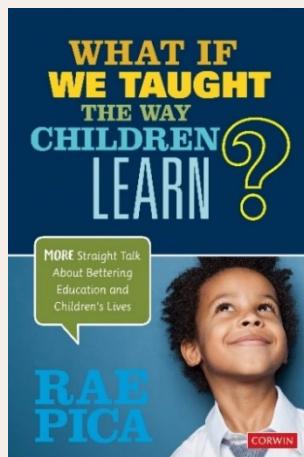
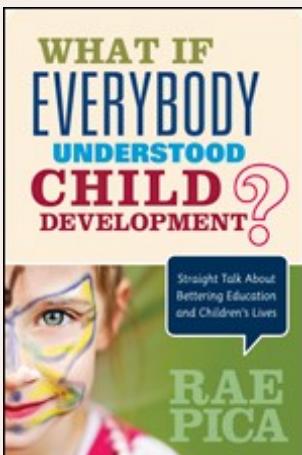
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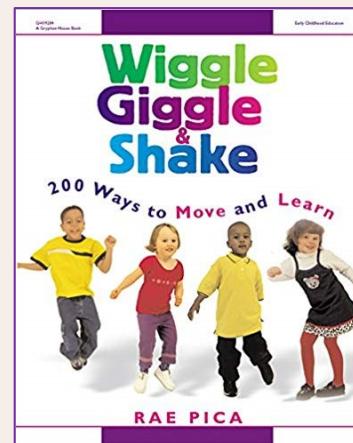
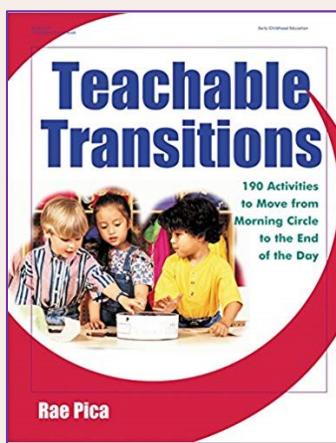
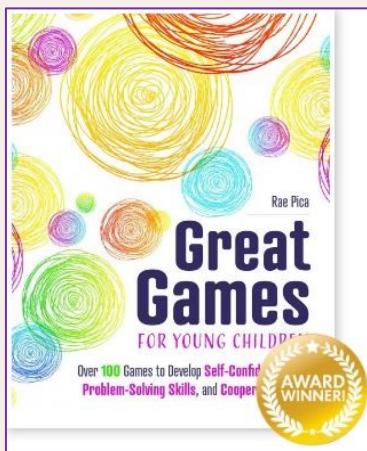
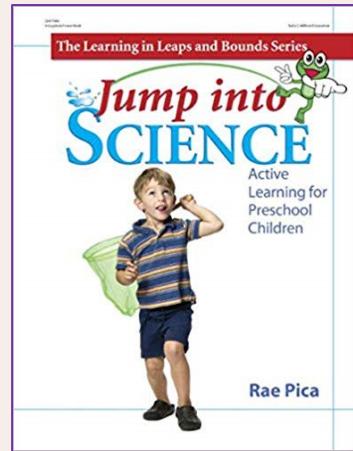
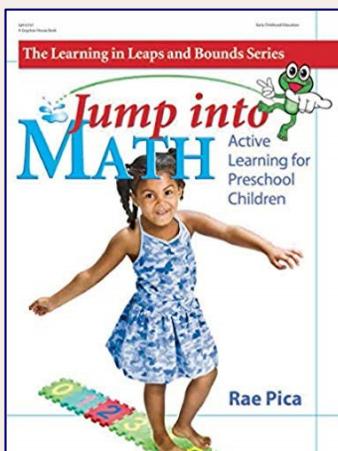
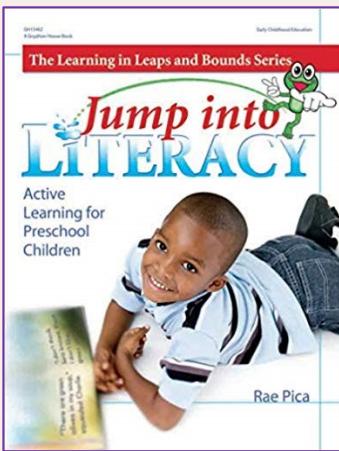
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Rae has been an early childhood education consultant since 1980. Dedicated to developing and educating the whole child, she is the author of 22 books, including the text *Experiences in Movement & Music* (in its 5th edition), and two of her latest, *What If We Taught the Way Children Learn?* and *Acting Out! Avoid Behavior Challenges with Active Learning Games & Activities*.

Rae is a former adjunct instructor for the University of New Hampshire and is currently a blogger, online course creator, and popular virtual presenter. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, Eric Jensen's Learning Brain Expo, state WIC organizations, education conferences, resource and referral agencies, and schools in 46 states and Canada are among those who have invited Rae to address their groups.

As a consultant, Rae has shared her expertise with such groups as

- ✓ Sesame Street Research Department
- ✓ Head Start Bureau
- ✓ Centers for Disease Control
- ✓ Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*
- ✓ Gymboree
- ✓ Hasbro
- ✓ Mattel
- ✓ Nike
- ✓ Bright Horizons
- ✓ Canadian Broadcast Corp.
- ✓ Chicago Children's Museum