

Emergent Literacy: All About Listening Skills



10 Activities to Promote Active
Listening

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Listening is one of the four components of the language arts, or emergent literacy.

Language is either given or received. And for communication to be effective, the individual on the receiving end must have the ability to listen well, which is a learned skill.

Listening is also essential for learning to speak and read skillfully, as children who have difficulty learning to read often can't hear the sequences of sounds in words.

The activities in this guide promote:

- active listening
- auditory discrimination (the ability to distinguish among sounds)
- phonological awareness (an appreciation for the sounds and meaning of spoken words)
- phonemic awareness (an awareness that language is broken down into small units called phonemes, which correspond to the letters of the alphabet).

Although it all sounds like serious business (which it is), you can be sure your child will still have plenty of fun with it. And having fun is how young children best learn!

What Do You Hear?



Ask the children to close their eyes. Then make a sound and ask the children to identify it.

Some possible sounds include:

- rattling keys
- clapping hands
- opening & closing a drawer or door
- whistling
- clucking your tongue
- making a kissing noise

A Listening Walk



Explain to the children that you're all going outside on a listening walk to discover how many things they can hear. Remind them to put on their "listening ears" and to move very quietly. Then take them for at least a 10-minute walk!

You can listen for either man-made sounds (e.g., footsteps, a car horn, a train in the distance) or for natural ones (e.g., a dog barking, the wind rustling leaves, a bird singing).

When you get back, ask the children to describe the things they heard. You can even ask them to act out some of them!

Heads, Shoulders, Knees & Toes



Invite the children to touch the corresponding part of the body (head, shoulders, knees, and toes) as you call out each part, first in this order and later in varying orders.

Eventually you can also increase and decrease the speed at which you call out the body parts to introduce the children to the tempo of sounds (related to speech patterns).

Curriculum Connections: Beyond emergent literacy, this simple activity is also a *science* experience because it involves body-part identification. And tempo is a component of *music*.

Where Is It Coming From?



Invite the children to stand in the middle of the room or yard with eyes closed. You then tiptoe to another area and make a sound, such as clapping your hands.

The children, with eyes still closed, turn and point to where the sound is coming from. Invite them to open their eyes, to see whether or not they guessed correctly!

Ask them to close their eyes again so you can tiptoe to a different area and make the sound again.

Pop Goes the Weasel

Sing or play a recording of “Pop Goes the Weasel” as the children walk around the room or yard. Each time they hear the “pop,” they jump into the air.

More to Do:

- If you’re signing the song, change the tempo at which you sing it with every round.
- Ask the children to both jump and clap with each “pop.”
- Invite the children to jump and change direction with each “pop.”
- Challenge the children to freeze each time they hear the “pop” and not move again until the next verse begins. (This is an excellent exercise in self-regulation!)



Five Little Monkeys

Read each of the following lines,
demonstrating the movements suggested in
parentheses and encouraging the children to
perform the actions with you.

Five little monkeys (hold up 5 fingers)
Jumping on the bed, (move closed fists up &
down)

One fell off and bumped his head
(hold up 1 finger; put hand to head)
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said,
(mime being on the telephone)
"No more monkeys jumping on the bed."
(shake finger "no-no" twice).

Four little monkeys...(hold up 4 fingers)
Three little monkeys...(hold up 3 fingers)
Two little monkeys...(hold up 2 fingers)

One little monkey...(hold up one finger)
(Lines 2 thru 4 remain the same)
Get those monkeys back to bed."
(extend arm & point twice toward "bed")

Listen Closely



Sit on the floor with the children and explain that you're going to say three words that begin with the same sound but that each requires a different action. For example, when you say *sunshine*, they should make a circle above the head with the arms. When you say *sea*, they should clap hands in front of the body like a seal. And when you say *salute*, they should salute with hand to forehead.

Tell the children the words you've chosen and demonstrate the accompanying actions. Start by saying the words in the same order, eventually mixing them up!

Listen Closely II

More challenging versions of the previous game include the following:

- Occasionally say a word with the same beginning sound but to which you haven't assigned an action. For example, if you've been using *sunshine*, *seal*, and *salute*, you might suddenly add *silly*, *soap*, or another word that begins with *s*.
- To focus on the same sound – for example, the /s/ sound – over a period of time, change the words and the actions. For example, you might use *soap* (pretending to scrub hands), *sandwich* (putting hands together, one palm facing up and the other down), and *sky* (the children point upwards).
- To familiarize the children with the sound of two consonants together, use words like *smile*, *smoke*, and *smell*.

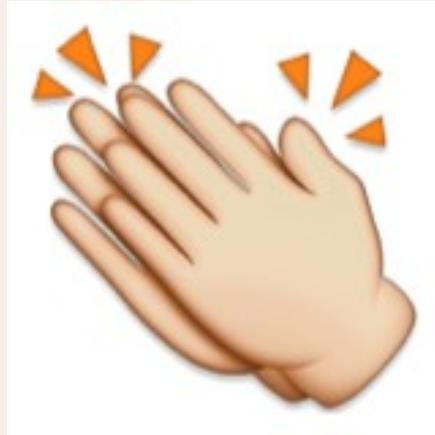
I Spy



Tell the children, "I spy with my little eye something that begins with a /b/ sound."

The children then point to, move to, or touch something that begins with that letter. Repeat with other letters with which they're familiar.

Mimic a Rhythm



Sit with the children and clap out a simple rhythm (for example, 1-2) on your lap or on the floor in front of you. Count the beats aloud at first to help the children succeed.

Continue in this manner, using different rhythms (for example, 1-2-3; 1-2-1-2-3).

When the children are ready, allow each in turn to choose the rhythm!

Curriculum Connections: Rhythm, of course, is part of the content area of *music*, as well as emergent literacy. And counting is a component of *math*.

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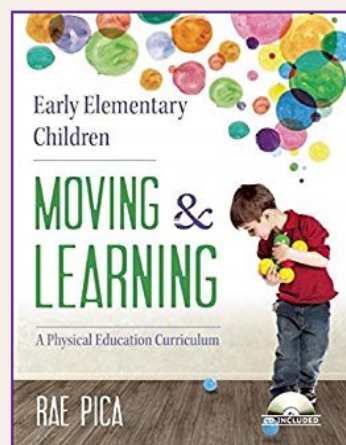
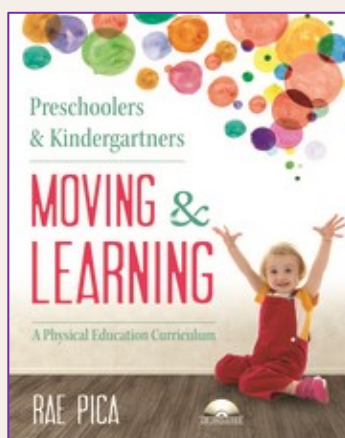
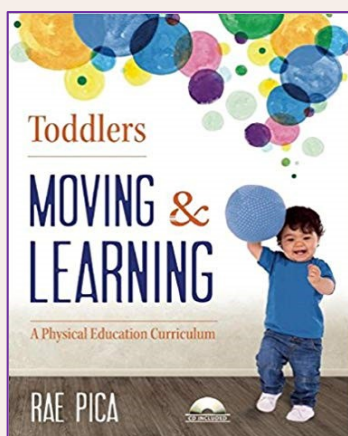
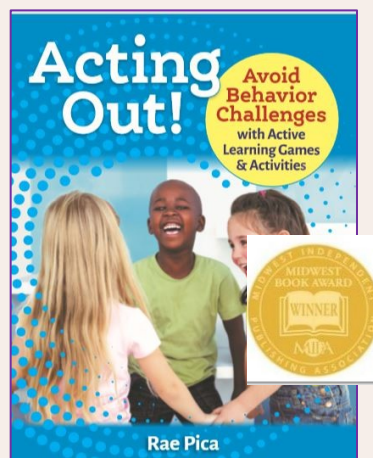
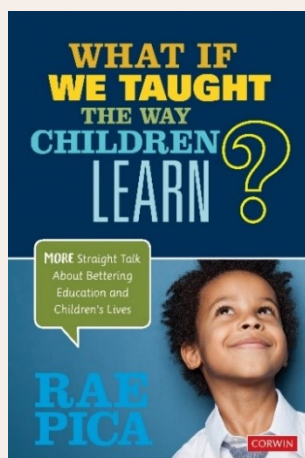
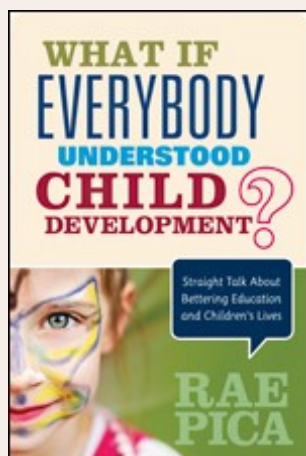
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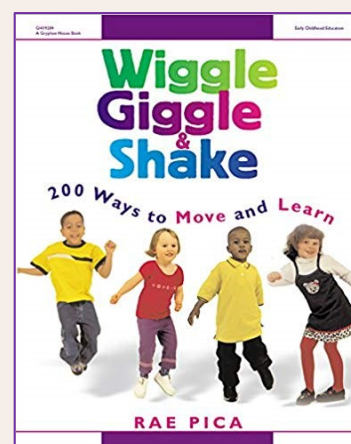
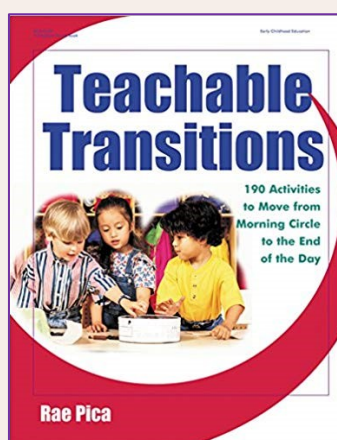
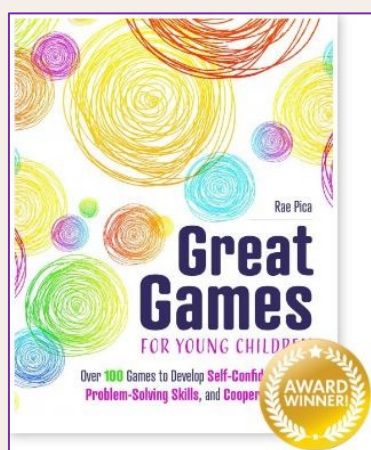
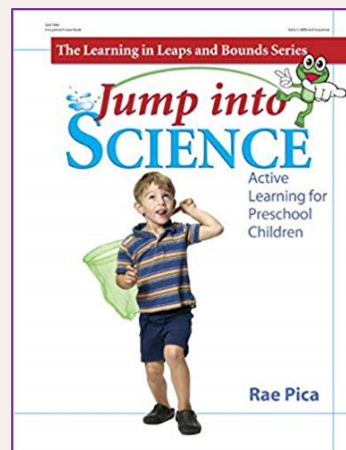
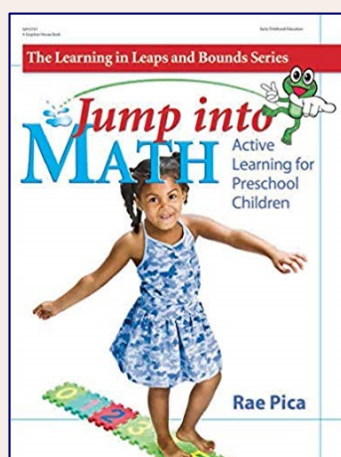
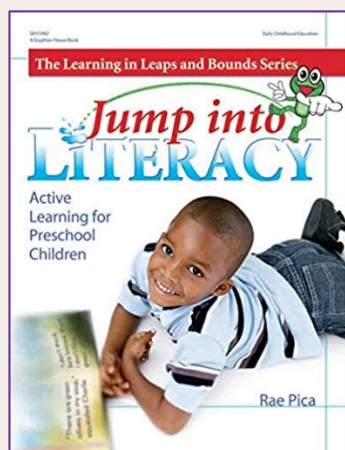
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RAE PICA



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
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