

Life Sciences: Animals & Other Creatures



**10 Activities That Help Promote
Understanding of & Appreciation for
the World's Creatures**

Young children are fascinated by animals, insects, arachnids, and pretty much all creatures that don't fall into the category of *human*. And because these creatures are so appealing, they are particularly relevant to children. They also have much to teach children!

Moving like different creatures can contribute not only to knowledge about them but also to the development of empathy, an essential component of the social/emotional domain. By imagining what it's like to *be the animal/s*, children will perhaps never be able to imagine a world *without* the animals.

Of course, moving like different animals and creatures also offers children opportunities to become familiar with a variety of movement skills and elements. If that's to happen, however, it's not enough merely to ask children to pretend to be various creatures. You must create a greater awareness by discussing pertinent characteristics of the creatures portrayed. Cats, for example, move very slowly and quietly. What is it about the way they use their muscles and paws that makes this possible? What is it about their spines that makes them able to twist, stretch, and arch so easily?

Animal Sounds

Make the following animal sounds, one at a time. After each sound, ask children to identify the animal that makes it. Then encourage them to move in the way that animal moves.

Give them plenty of time to explore before starting with another animal sound.

Possible animal sounds include:

- Elephant
- Horse
- Owl
- Lion
- House cat
- Dog
- Mouse
- Rooster
- Songbird
- Cow



Additional Curriculum Connections: Learning about sound is part of *physical science*, and active listening is part of *emergent literacy*.

Four-Legged Friends



The two most common – and popular – of our four-legged friends are cats and dogs. This activity encourages children to consider the similarities and differences between them.

Talk to the children about the fact that dogs and cats both move on all four legs. Ask them first to pretend to be a dog and then a cat. Do they move differently? Next, invite them to show you how a big, heavy dog “clomps” along. How does a cat move when trying to sneak up on a bird?

Additional Curriculum Connections: This activity explores *light* and *heavy*, which are quantitative concepts (*math*).

The Tortoise & the Hare



Talk to the children about tortoises and hares and their characteristics. Then invite them to move like each.

Later, if you have a sheet, a large towel, or a parachute available, the children can pretend to be tortoises going in and out of a shell.

Additional Curriculum Connections: If you use the words *slow* and *fast*, you'll be adding an element of *emergent literacy*. Controlling the speed of one's movement contributes to self-regulation (*social studies*).

Farm Friends



Talk about the animals listed below, comparing their physical traits, sounds, and movements.

Invite the children to begin moving around the room like either a pig, cow, sheep, chicken, or turkey. When you call out “Cluck-cluck,” for example, they begin moving like a chicken. When you call out “Moo,” they move like a cow, and so forth.

Additional Curriculum Connections: This is a great auditory discrimination activity, which qualifies it as *emergent literacy* as well as science.

The Elephant

Children are especially fascinated by large animals, and elephants are the largest land animals.

Although we adults often employ familiar movements to depict elephants, you should allow the children to find their own way.

Talk to the children about elephants, known for their size and unusual nose, which is called a *trunk*. Then invite the children to demonstrate how an elephant swings, eats with, and showers with its trunk! Next, encourage them to move around the room or yard like an elephant.



Additional Curriculum

Connections: Because this activity involves the quantitative concept of *heavy*, it also falls under *math*.

Hibernate!



In the winter, many animals have less food available to them, so some cope by “going to sleep” during this season. It’s called hibernation and helps animals save energy when food is hard to find. Although many animals hibernate, we think most often of bears.

Place a hoop or carpet square on the floor and assign each to a child. Explain that this represents the bear’s cave. When you say “lumber,” the children move like a bear throughout the room. When you say, “slumber!” they go to their “cave”, lie down, and “go to sleep.” Repeat, varying the length of time for both lumbering and slumbering.

Additional Curriculum Connections: The active listening experience and distinction between the two words places this also under *emergent literacy*.

Creatures That Swim



Talk to the children about the different creatures listed here, explaining that the one thing they have in common is that they swim mostly on top of the water. Then invite the children to pretend to be: a person snorkeling, a duck, a dog swimming, and an alligator.

Later, you can invite them to be these creatures that swim mostly underwater: a person scuba-diving, an eel, a goldfish, and a shark.

Being Birds

Talk to the children about the following actions, which are typical of many kinds of birds, and then invite them to demonstrate the different actions:

- Flying
- Landing on a branch
- Building a nest
- Feeding a baby bird
- Bathing in a puddle



Next, discuss the birds below and the different approaches they have for getting food. Challenge the children to demonstrate the following:

- A woodpecker pecking for insects on the side of a tree
- A robin scratching for worms in the ground
- A hummingbird hovering at a flower to sip nectar
- A heron “fishing” along the shore
- A pelican diving for a fish
- A seagull searching for food at the beach

Animals That...

Now that the children have had a lot of experience considering different kinds of animals and pretending to move like them, they should be ready to classify them!

Talk with your child about all the different animals they've pretended to be. What are some things they have in common? What are some differences?

Next, invite them to move and sound like an animal that would belong to each of the following groups – an animal that:

- walks
- runs
- jumps
- flies
- swims



Metamorphosis



For butterflies, there are 4 basic stages in the metamorphosis process: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, and butterfly. Talk to the children about this process. Then, for the activity, provide each child with a large towel to act as the chrysalis.

Invite the children to lie on the floor or ground, wrapped in their “chrysalis.” At your signal, they slowly begins to emerge and eventually to shed the chrysalis. Finally, they turn\ into a butterflies and flutter around the room or yard.

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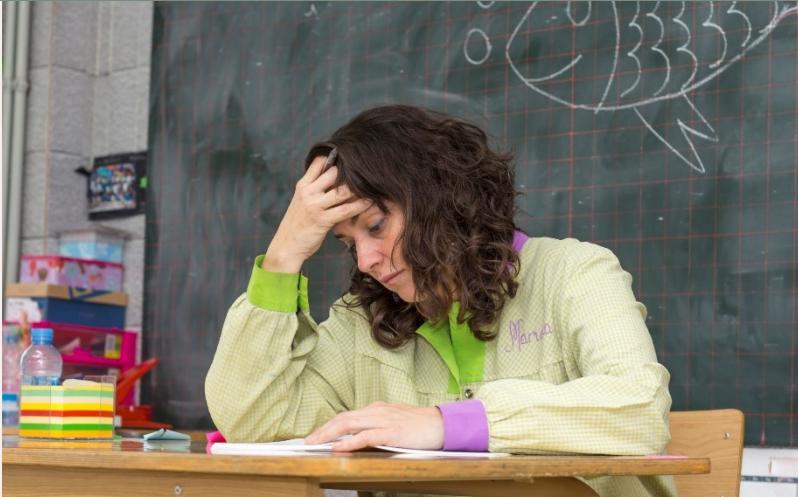
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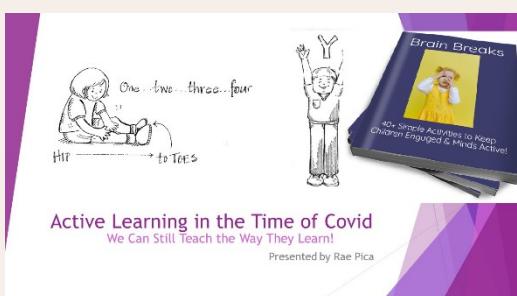
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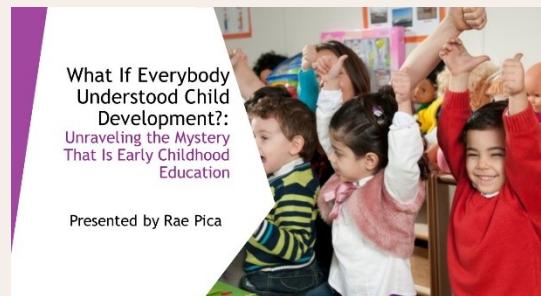
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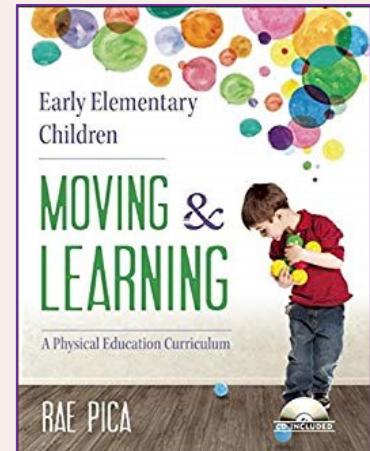
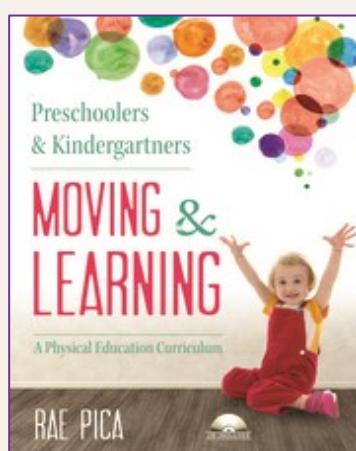
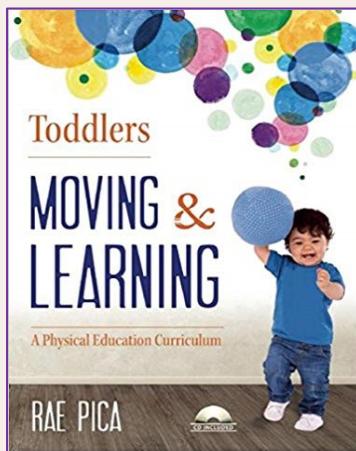
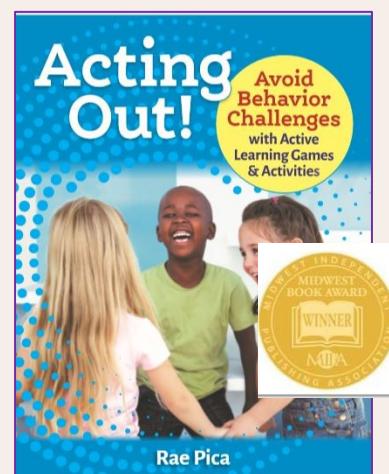
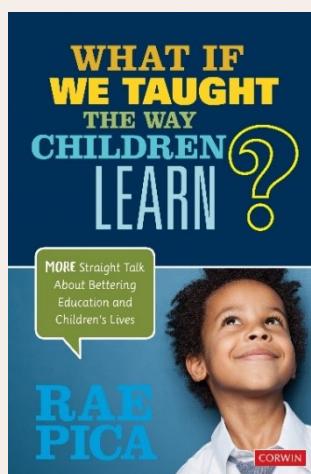
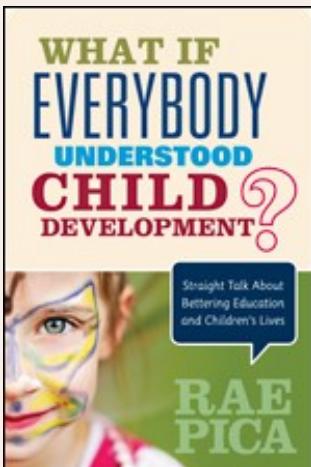
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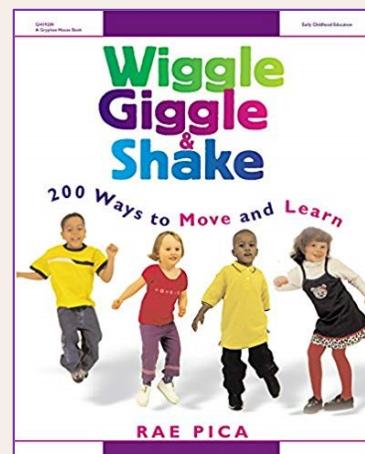
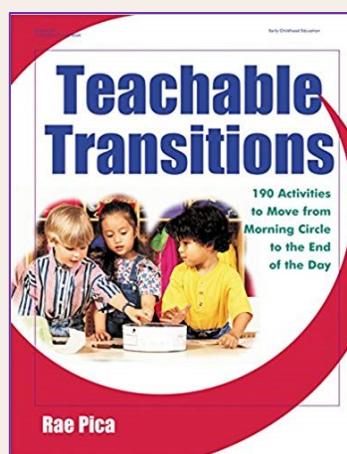
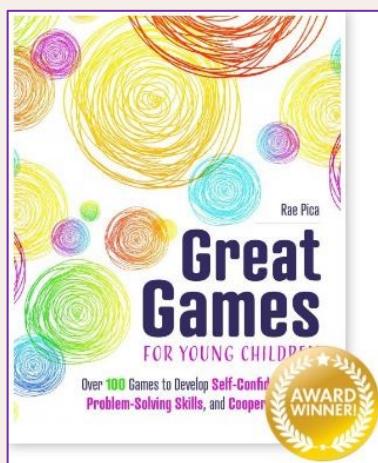
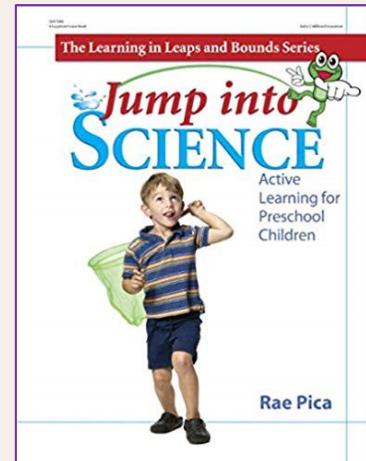
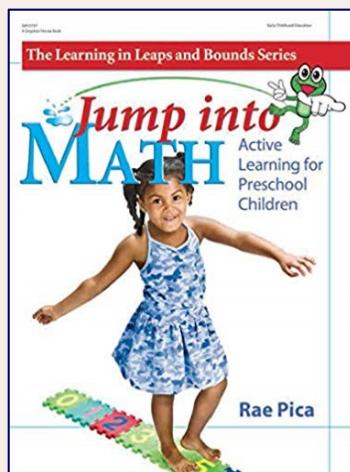
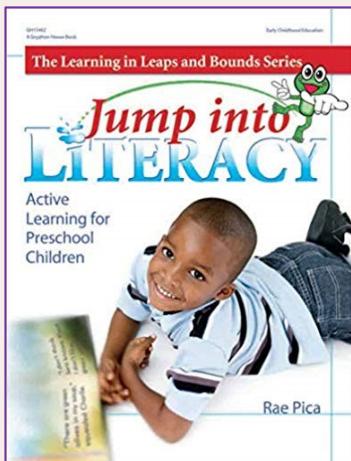
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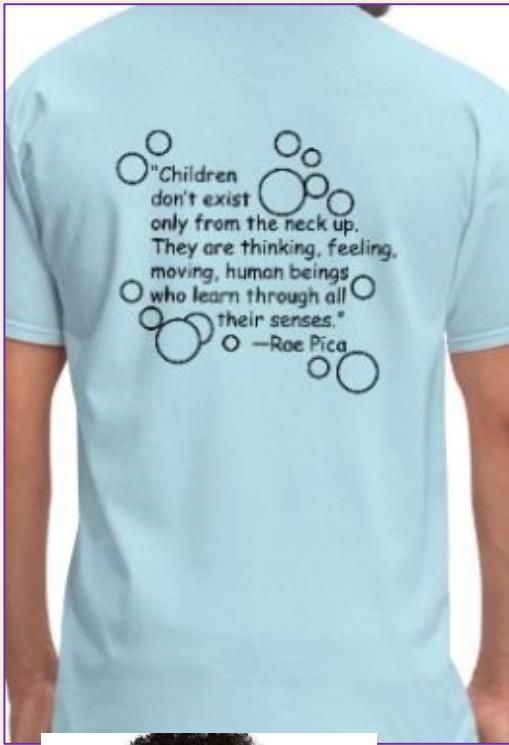
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RAE PICA



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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