



How to Make an Experience Book¹

Children who are blind or visually impaired develop meaningful concepts through experiences. While a child with vision might understand what a dog is by an illustration in a book, a child who is blind or visually impaired will need to pet a dog and hear it bark to fully understand what a dog is. The experience of meeting a dog can be reinforced by making a tactile experience book where artifacts from an event a child experiences are incorporated onto the pages of a simple, sturdy book. A child can use these books independently by turning the pages, exploring the artifacts on each page and pretending to read the story aloud. Parents can also read the experience book with the child and talk about what they did together.

Selecting topics for tactile experience books is as easy as examining the objects that are part of the environments in which children with visual impairments spend time. Events can be planned specifically to collect artifacts for a book, or artifacts can be collected as part of a naturally occurring event, such as a trip to a baseball game or a day at the park. Ideally, your child will participate in these collection activities, collecting and putting aside the objects to be used later in the book.

Regardless of your child's involvement in his or her collection, artifacts must be items with which the child has come in contact tactually. Using car keys to represent going for a ride will not be appropriate unless your child has in some way used the keys, perhaps to unlock the car door. Using objects that the adult associates with an event, but which are unfamiliar to the child, is a common mistake of inexperienced bookmakers. In addition, artifacts used in the book must be real, not miniature representations of an object. Miniatures do not provide the same detail for the tactual learner that they provide to the visual learner. Thinking again of representing a ride in a car, a toy car would not be an appropriate artifact, unless perhaps, the child played with the toy car during the ride. In general, a toy car is very different from the car experience of a child who is blind or who has low vision. A better representative object might be a swatch of fabric from the child's car seat or the seat belt buckle that the child has helped to fasten.

Preferred books are those that are easily handled by the child. Heavy cardboard should be used for the cover and pages, which should be securely fastened. Metal rings are more durable than ribbon or string to bind the pages. It is best for only one object (or category of object) to be placed on the page. Because an object that has been glued to the page creates a different experience than the same object held in the hand, we recommend that artifacts be affixed to the pages using loop fasteners (Velcro®) whenever possible, so that the child can experience them in three dimensions. Another way to assure that objects can be fully accessed by the child is to

¹ Adapted from <https://www.tsbvi.edu/deaf-blind-project/203-resources/2627-creating-and-using-tactile-experience-books-for-young-children-with-visual-impairments>



store them in Zip-lock bags that have been glued or stapled to the page. Large objects, which can add bulk to the book and make it unmanageable by small hands, can be attached by a string to a particular page and stored outside of the pages, to be pulled nearer by the child when that page is read.

Another method of incorporating a large object, such as the big bow from a birthday present, is to place the item on the cover. The child can use this artifact to identify the book and distinguish it from others in his or her collection. Covers don't need to be fancy. Although it is visually meaningful to have a book about Jim's trip on the city bus cut out in the shape of a bus, this shape doesn't provide the same stimulus for the student with visual impairment. Keeping the transfer pass that the driver handed to the child as he or she boarded the bus and gluing it to the cover would be a more meaningful reminder of the trip.

Here are some of our favorite experience book themes with some ideas of what you can put in them:

- Birthday Party Experience Book
 - Cupcake wrapper
 - A piece of brightly colored wrapping paper
 - Ribbon (you can put the bow on the cover of the book)
 - A birthday candle
 - Confetti or crepe ribbon
 - A balloon (deflated)
- Laundromat Experience Book
 - Quarters
 - A dryer sheet
 - Powdered detergent (scented)
 - A sock or other small article of clothing
 - A swatch of fabric from the child's car seat or seat belt
- A Day at the Park
 - Grass or a dandelion that you picked
 - Sand or wood chips from the playground
 - The snack you ate that day



- The hat you wore when it started to rain
 - The bread crust or bird seed you brought for the ducks
- Things in Mommy's Purse
 - A comb
 - A small spiral notepad
 - A pen
 - Lip-gloss
 - Credit card
 - Coins

