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## Symbols in Literacy Development .G1990

Janet S. Hanna

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

Kayla M. Hinrichs

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln, khinrichs3@unl.edu*

Carla J. Mahar

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln, cmahar1@unl.edu*

John Defrain

*University of Nebraska--Lincoln, jdefrain1@unl.edu*

Tonia R. Durden

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln, tdurden2@unl.edu*

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## Symbols in Literacy Development

Adapted by Janet S. Hanna, Kayla M. Hinrichs and Carla J. Mahar, Extension Educators  
and John D. DeFrain and Tonia R. Durden, Family Life Specialists

*StoryQUEST's Vision: High-quality early relationships and experiences throughout their daily routines provide each infant and toddler with the tools and skills to build a strong foundation for future school readiness. Families, caregivers, and communities as a whole collaborate to enable all children to become highly competent in language and literacy. This series was developed as part of a national research project — StoryQUEST — through the California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University.*

This NebGuide describes physical and social features of home environments that encourage the development of literacy in young children. It is the seventh of nine NebGuides in this series.

### Physical and Social Features of Quality Literacy Environments

Early environments matter and nurturing relationships are essential for literacy development of young children. Infants and toddlers who have secure and trusting relationships with their caregivers are more involved in literacy activities.

Infants and toddlers increase their language and literacy behaviors when they have access to a variety of literacy tools. When materials and activities are culturally meaningful and related to literacy routines, infants and toddlers engage in more complex interactions and are more eager to try new things.

### Interaction with Symbols

When adults provide specific purposes and opportunities for using literacy tools or strategies, infants and toddlers interact more with print and symbols.

When infants and toddlers are in environments that support the development of intentional behavior, they learn to communicate and use symbols better. These environments allow children to explore objects and assign meaning to activities. They become aware that their behaviors have an effect on others. They learn that people and objects can be used as tools to solve problems.

### Physical Features of Symbols

Following is a list of toys and other items in a child's environment that can provide an enhanced opportunity for literacy development.

Toys and objects that make sounds, light up, or move when a child plays with them (cause and effect)

- Rattles
- Squeaky toys
- Musical toys
- Toys that light when moved or pushed
- Jack-in-the-Box

Problem-solving tools

- Things to step on (benches, steps, big blocks)
- Containers to put things in (boxes, shelves, bowls)
- Things to carry toys and objects (cloth sacks or bags, baskets)

Toys that represent something else

- Dolls
- Stuffed or plastic animals
- Pictures
- Blocks
- Boxes
- Cars, trucks, planes

Tools adapted for use by children with special needs

- Adapted books with big page tabs
- Velcro on book covers or pages to prevent slipping
- Special crayon and marker holders

Signs and labels

- Photographs of children and families
- Pictures of daily routines
- Pictures of toys on shelves where they are usually stored
- Picture communication symbols

## Drawing tools

- Sand
- Finger paint
- Markers and crayons

## Children's books

- Portray children of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and with disabilities
- Reflect languages and cultures of children in the environment/community
- Are appropriate for ages and developmental levels of children who will use them

## Social Features of Symbols

Adults can use a variety of strategies to encourage the development and use of symbols for all children, including infants and toddlers with disabilities.

- Respond to infants' and toddlers' attempts to communicate with expressions, sounds, gestures (pointing, raising arms to be picked up) and words.
- Encourage children to explore objects and toys in the environment and see what they do, how they can be used.
- Make adaptations to assure all children, including infants and toddlers with disabilities, participate in literacy activities.

## Modeling the Use of Words, Symbols, and Print

Describe what you are doing.

- *"I'm putting on my coat so we can get ready to go!"*

Talk about people and routines represented in pictures.

- *"That's a picture of Grandma!"*
- *"Look, this is a picture of us playing outside!"*

Talk about labels.

- *"Do you see the picture of the blocks? That's where the blocks go."*
- *"I see your name here, Gabriel. That means this must be your coat."*

Write lists or notes and describe what you're doing to the child.

- *"I'm going to write a quick note to Donna to let her know I'm picking you up early today since we're going to the doctor's office."*

Call attention to the adult's use of print.

- *"What time is it? Oh, the clock says it's 5:00."*
- *"Is this store open on Saturday? The sign here says it is."*
- *"Let's look up the number in the phone book."*

Look at catalogs, books, or magazines for fun.

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