

# Explorers Curriculum for Toddlers and Twos

## Boxes, Baskets, and Bags



Developed by  
**Marcy White**  
Program Coordinator  
2021

Arkansas State University Childhood Services  
JoAnn Nalley, Director



**Thank you** to the following colleagues who supported the development of Explorers Curriculum for Toddlers and Twos.

**Reviewers**

Beth Vansandt  
Beverly Wright  
Julie Heien  
Katayoun Zadeh  
Mandi Edmonds  
Meghan Foster  
Phyl McWhorter

**Editor**

Diana Courson  
Associate Director  
A-State Childhood Services

# Let's Explore Boxes, Baskets, and Bags

## Table of Contents

Let's Explore Boxes, Baskets, and Bags	1
Getting Ready to Explore	2
Invitations to Explore Through Play	3
Learning About Lids	4
Friends in Tins	6
Big Boxes	8
An Even Bigger Box	10
Buckets and Balls	12
Simple Sacks	14
Purses and Wallets	16
Dropping In	18
Wonder Boxes	20
Gift Bag Prop Box	22
Enhancing Our Play Spaces	24
Enhancing Our Daily Routines	25
Baskets, Boxes, and Bags in the World Around Us	26
Books About Boxes, Baskets, and Bags	27
Songs, Rhymes and Games	28
Moving On	30

# Let's Explore Boxes, Baskets, and Bags

Consider all the ways that a young child can experiment with a simple box: fill it up, dump it out, bang on it, slide it, try to fit inside it... It's no wonder that toddler parents often discover that their child is more interested in the box than the new toy that came in the box!

Containers are also a part of everyday life. Crackers come in boxes and so do diapers and wipes. Clean laundry arrives in a basket and dirty trash goes in a trash can. That's a container, too! Boxes, baskets, and bags may take on new meaning for older toddlers as they begin to engage in symbolic play. Perhaps a large box will become a pretend car or a basket will be transformed into a bed for a soft toy animal.

This topic might be a fit for your group if

- You've noticed children emptying and filling containers or trying to fit themselves inside containers.
- You've heard children asking questions or talking about everyday containers such as backpacks, cereal boxes, or your group's first aid kit.
- Favorite play objects include nesting cups, shape sorters, buckets, or purses.

## Let's Talk About Boxes, Baskets, and Bags

Use words like these during everyday conversations with children.

carton  
crate  
empty/full  
handles  
heavy/light  
in/out  
lid  
open/closed  
top/bottom

Words to describe size

Words to describe actions such as lift,  
carry, slide, sit on, fill up



## Getting Ready to Explore Boxes, Baskets, and Bags

With your teaching team, think about and discuss these questions.

- **What do these children seem most curious about?**

Consider experiences that children have already had with containers. How have you seen them play and interact with boxes, baskets, and bags recently?

Children in your group might be most interested in the tricky challenge of removing lids from tins and jars. Or they might seem eager to engage in big-body play with large boxes. Let your observations and conversations with children be your guide as you choose experiences to share.

- **What are our learning goals for individual children and the group as a whole?**

As you plan, consider the words, skills, and concepts that children can learn and strengthen through their play. Choose experiences that support specific objectives for learning. Strive to create well-rounded plans that support all domains of development.

- **How can we connect this topic to our everyday experiences?**

Because many of our interactions with children take place in the context of care routines, it is valuable to think about opportunities to encourage children's investigation during meals, clean-up times, diapering/toileting, and transitions.

Let families know that the group seems interested in boxes, baskets, bags, and other containers. Invite them to tell about their children's experiences with containers at home.



## Invitations to Explore Boxes, Baskets, and Bags

Use the ideas on pages 4-23 to set the stage for open-ended exploration through play. These unhurried play invitations will follow a simple cycle.

- 1. Adults gather and offer interesting materials for children to explore.**  
We make space for the materials and schedule ample time for exploration. We ensure that children have access to each play invitation many times over days or weeks.
- 2. Children take the lead as they experiment and explore.**  
Supervision and guidance are provided to protect safety, but children are welcome to follow their own interests and use materials in their own ways.
- 3. Adults notice when children want to interact with them.**  
A child might point to something, offer a play object, ask a question, or invite us to play. As we talk with children, we often pause to give them time to think and respond. We make time for meaningful, back-and-forth interactions with each child.
- 4. Over time, adults make subtle changes to enhance and extend play.**  
We might add a few more materials or change how the materials are arranged in the space. These choices are guided by observations of children and are intended to help children satisfy play urges, construct knowledge, and deepen their understanding.



## Learning about Lids

Let's investigate containers with lids. How do they open and close?

### Materials

Begin with a collection of clean, empty, lidded containers. Here are some examples.

- Oatmeal canisters
- Yogurt or margarine tubs
- Lidded gift boxes
- Metal tins with lids
- Plastic jars and snack containers with lids that twist off
- Playdough canisters
- Other safe, sturdy containers with lids

You might start with several of one kind of container. New and different containers can be added over time. Place containers where children can easily reach and investigate them. You may wish to begin with some lids off and some lids on.

#### Safety Spotlight

Do not use small lids/caps that are choking hazards. Supervise play and check materials often. Remove broken or damaged materials from the play area immediately if there are sharp edges or small pieces.

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children explore the containers. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Experiment with different ways to remove and replace lids.
Examine lids to try to find the right one to match a container.
Investigate things that can fit inside containers.
Drum on containers or shake filled containers to make noise.
Pretend to eat or drink from containers.
Explore attributes of containers or lids by sliding, stacking, rolling, or in another way.

## Learning about Lids (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Name containers using words like *box*, *canister*, and *tin*.
- Describe materials using words for color, shape, or size. Describe materials using words for attributes like *shiny*, *smooth*, and *transparent*.
- Notice with children. Which containers are made of plastic? Cardboard? Metal?
- Describe the child's specific actions using words like matching, twisting, and closing.
- Model and use self-talk as you interact with the materials. "Does this red lid fit? No, it is too small!" Get down on the child's level and work slowly and deliberately so that they can see exactly what you're doing.
- Ask interesting questions that children can think about and/or answer with words or gestures. "How is this canister lid different from that box lid?"
- If a child requests help with a lid, provide just a little help. For example, rather than opening a margarine tub all the way, pry the edge up just a little bit and invite the child to try again.
- Set up a simple game with a row of containers and a pile of lids. Work together to match containers and lids.
- Offer collections of materials that can be used to fill and empty containers, such as smooth tree branch slices, very large beads, or wooden rings.

### Including Every Explorer

Think about the different skills needed to open each container. Ensure that some containers can be successfully opened and closed by each child in the group.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

**Cognitive Development – CD 1.1, CD1.2, CD2.1, CD 3.1**

**Physical Development and Health – PH2.1**

**Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.2, MT 2.1, MT4.1**

**Scientific and Technology - ST1.1**





## Friends in Tins

Let's investigate objects that can fit inside containers. Which ones will fit? This investigation begins with a surprise!

### Materials

- Cookie tins, shoeboxes, or other containers with lids
- Plastic or wooden farm animals

If possible, provide a variety of sizes of tins or boxes so that larger animals fit in some, but not all, of the tins.

Before children enter the play space, place a toy animal in each of several tins. Cover with the lids. Place some empty tins and a basket with more animals nearby.

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children explore the tins and animals. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Experiment with different strategies to remove and replace lids.
Discover and remove animals from tins.
Add animals to empty tins.
Notice when an animal won't fit and experiment to find containers that will hold larger animals.
Try fitting more than one animal in a tin.
Pretend that tins are homes, barns, or beds for animals.
Experiment with filling tins with other play materials, such as blocks or toy people.

## Friends in Tins (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Use the words *tin* and *lid*, and other container names if applicable.
- Invite children to show and talk about animals they discover in the tins.
- Describe containers and animals with words such as *open/closed, inside/outside*.
- Talk about the animals, their features, and the sounds they make. (“Mooooo!”)
- Pretend to be surprised when a child invites you to open a tin with an animal inside.
- Suggest a simple guessing game. Can you guess which animal is in this tin?
- Model and use self-talk as you interact with the materials. “Uh-oh! My horse doesn’t fit in this box. I need to find a box that is larger.”

### Did You Know?

Adults usually describe objects by listing an adjective first. Examples include small box, pink pig, and round lid. Some toddlers seem to understand more readily when adjectives are used *after* the article. Examples include box that is small, pig that is pink, and lid that is round. Give it a try and notice how children respond!

### Including Every Explorer

Notice the different skills needed to open each container. Ensure that some containers can be successfully opened and closed by each child in the group. Packing tape or duct tape can be used to make tabs to assist children as they grasp flat lids.

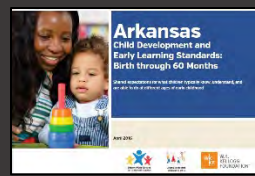
This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

**Cognitive Development – CD 1.1, CD 2.4, CD 3.1, CD 3.2**

**Physical Development and Health - PH2.1**

**Language Development – LD1.1, LD2.1**

**Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1, MT 3.1, MT4.1**



## Big Boxes

Let's investigate cardboard boxes. How many ways can we use a box?

### Materials

- ❑ Large cardboard boxes such as diaper boxes and shipping boxes.

Place several cardboard boxes in the play space. Boxes can also be added to your outdoor play area.

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children explore the boxes. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Sit inside boxes.
Turn boxes upside down to sit on top of them.
Fill boxes with toys and dump them out again.
Slide or carry boxes around the play space.
Push or pull a friend in a box.
Pretend that a box is a car, bed, oven, or another familiar object.
Stack boxes. Knock over stacked boxes.
Make a long line of boxes - like a wall or train.
Notice and talk about pictures or words on boxes.
Deconstruct boxes by tearing or crushing them.

### Safety Spotlight

**Climbing on stacks of boxes isn't safe under most circumstances. Think about other places where children can safely climb so that you will be prepared to redirect unsafe play if needed.**

### Helpful Hints

Invite families to bring in boxes to share. Having spare boxes will allow you to easily replace and recycle boxes as needed.

## Big Boxes (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Describe what you see children doing using words like *on*, *in*, *under*, *empty*, and *full*.
- Name parts of the box as children interact with them: *top*, *bottom*, *sides*, *flaps*, *tape*, or *label*.
- Help children notice what other children are doing with the boxes.
- Support children when moments of frustration bubble up. Encourage persistence. Big boxes can be uncooperative sometimes!
- Wonder with children. Can a child fit in this box? How about an adult? Compare sizes of boxes and people.
- Offer crayons or chalk for drawing on and in boxes.
- Open a box on both ends and secure flaps to create a tunnel. Who or what can travel through the tunnel?

### Including Every Explorer

Children with limited muscle control may need special support to interact with boxes. For example, it may be helpful for an adult to hold a box still while the child climbs in and out at his/her own pace.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

**Social and Emotional Development – SE1.2, SE 2.1**

**Cognitive Development - CD1.2, CD2.2, CD2.3, CD3.1, CD3.2**

**Physical Development and Health - PH1.1, PH1.3**

**Creativity and Aesthetics – CA3.1**

**Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1, MT 3.1, MT4.1**



## An Even Bigger Box

Let's investigate the biggest box we've ever seen! What play possibilities does a cardboard appliance box hold?

### Materials

- ❑ A very large cardboard box, such as a box from a washer or dryer.

#### Safety Spotlight

Many oversized boxes are held together with large staples. Remove these if you can. If you cannot remove staples from your box, cover them with duct tape.

Crowding can be challenging for toddlers. Provide especially close supervision during this experience.

Turn the box so that the opening is on one side. Place it in your indoor or outdoor play space.

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children explore the very large box. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Climb inside the box.
Knock, slap, or drum on the box to make interesting sounds.
Notice how their voice sounds different when they are inside the box.
Try to move the box by pushing or pulling it.
Pretend to hide in the box.
Notice that there is less light in the box. It is dim/dark inside.
Create a den by bringing pillows and blankets into the box.
Pretend that the box is a home, dog house, or another familiar place.

### Helpful Hints

Families or a colleague may be able to share a box from a recent delivery. Or connect with local retailers that sell and deliver appliances. Alternatively, large, sturdy cardboard play structures can be purchased from many toy shops.

## An Even Bigger Box (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Describe what you see children doing with words like *inside*, *outside*, and *next to*.
- Imitate children's actions as they experiment. Experiment together. What sounds can we make?
- Help children clear chairs and other barriers if they want to work together to move the very large box.
- Play a simplified version of hide-and-seek by pretending to search for children who are in the box. (Supervision is still needed.)
- Try shining child-safe flashlights in the box or place a tube of rope lights in the box.
- Provide crayons or chalk for drawing on and in the box or stickers for attaching to the box.
- Follow the child's lead in pretend play games.
- Calmly support children's social development as they interact together in the box.

### Including Every Explorer

Some children may feel anxious about crawling into a large box. It is darker than the rest of the room, and it can be noisy inside. Rather than hurrying an unsure child, provide safe and supportive ways for them to watch from a distance. Describe what other children are doing and help them find the words to explain preferences to peers. ("Don't knock while I'm in the box. It's too loud.")

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

**Social and Emotional Development – SE1.2, SE 2.2**

**Cognitive Development - CD1.1, CD2.2, CD2.3, CD3.2**

**Physical Development and Health - PH1.1, PH1.3**

**Creativity and Aesthetics – CA3.1**

**Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1, MT 3.1, MT4.1**



## Buckets and Balls

Let's try emptying, filling, and transporting. What fits? How many can we carry?

### Materials

- Several sand pails and other child-safe buckets
- Collection of handheld balls, such as ball pit balls, tennis balls, and/or sensory balls

Prepare the play space by placing a collection of balls near the collection of buckets. You may wish to place several balls in one of the buckets. This experience can take place indoors or outdoors.

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children explore the buckets and balls. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Fill buckets.
Empty or dump out buckets.
Roll or toss balls. Use balls in other playful ways.
Use the buckets to carry balls from place to place.
Count how many balls fit in a bucket.
Compare sizes of buckets. Compare quantities of balls in buckets.
Gather all of the green balls or all of the tennis balls - or sort in another way.
Find other ways to transport balls using a doll stroller, toy dump truck, purse, or another "carrier".
Use a bucket in an inventive way - as a stool, a helmet, a drum, or in another way.

### Helpful Hints

You might borrow buckets from other groups for this experience. Collections of items like these can be fascinating for toddlers and twos!

## Buckets and Balls (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Introduce and model the words *bucket* and *pail*.
- Use words to describe what children are doing. Include position words such as *inside*, *on top of*, *next to*, and *under*.
- Model counting as you add balls to a bucket. Count as a child adds or removes balls from a bucket.
- Use the words *empty* and *full*, and words to describe quantity such as *more* and *less*.
- Initiate a simple tossing game using buckets as targets. Yay! Celebrate together when a ball lands in a bucket!
- Share the nursery rhyme, *Jack and Jill*. Explain that *pail* is another word for bucket. On a warm outdoor play day, you might try using pails to carry small amounts of water. (Direct supervision required.)
- Create an outdoor space where two-year-olds can explore buckets with sand or mud.

### Including Every Explorer

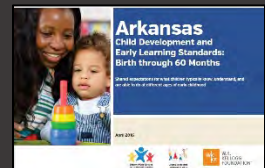
Older toddlers and twos may especially enjoy the challenge of oversized buckets. Try adding large pails from the hardware store or large plastic tubs from a party or garden shop. Larger buckets can also accommodate a wider variety of balls.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

**Cognitive Development – CD 2.4, CD3.1**

**Physical Development and Health – PH1.3**

**Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1, MT1.2, MT2.1,  
MT 3.1, MT4.1**





## Simple Sacks

Brown paper lunch bags are a simple material, but they can be used in many ways. How will we use them?

### Materials

- ☐ Brown paper lunch bags

Place a basket of unopened paper lunch bags in a place where children will find them. You may also want to open several of the bags to help children get started.

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children explore paper sacks. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Gather and carry unopened bags.
Discover that bags can be opened and expanded.
Put bags on their feet or heads.
Rip and tear bags.
Experiment with noises that can be made by crumpling or shaking bags.
Fill bags with play materials. Empty and repeat.
Fold or roll bags to close them.
Incorporate bags in pretend play. Examples: "This is my purse." "My boots."

### Safety Spotlight

**Plastic bags - including plastic grocery bags and zip-top plastic storage bags - are not safe for toddlers and twos. Only paper or fabric bags should be used.**

**Torn paper pieces can pose a choking hazard. Provide direct supervision while children interact with bags. Remove and dispose of mouthed or discarded paper bits.**

## Simple Sacks (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Use words to describe what children are doing. “You’re filling your bag with play food.”
- Use the words *empty* and *full*, *open* and *closed*.
- Invite children to notice the sounds that they can make by crumpling and shaking bags. Paper bags can be *noisy*.
- Notice how bags can split and tear if they are too full. Paper bags can be *fragile*.
- Invite children to try out interesting new words like *fold* and *crumple*.
- Introduce larger, grocery-sized sacks for children to investigate.
- Engage in child-initiated pretend play, following the child’s lead.
- Invite children to make marks on bags with crayons, markers, or chalk, or to paint on bags with watercolor paints.

### Including Every Explorer

Although many toddlers and twos may experiment with putting pieces of a bag in their mouths, most can be encouraged to find other ways to play. (Or more appropriate toys for mouthing.)

If your group includes very young toddlers or children who are especially prone to mouthing paper, you may need to choose a different play experience to share with children. You could also substitute sturdier bags, such as travel-sized pillowcases.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

**Cognitive Development – CD 1.2, CD 2.1, CD 2.3, CD3.2**

**Physical Development and Health – PH2.1**

**Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1, MT4.1**

**Science and Technology - ST 1.1**



## Purses and Wallets

Let's explore purses and wallets. What will we discover about these familiar objects?

### Materials

- Purses and tote bags
- Wallets
- Optional props such as paper play money, coupons, used-up plastic gift cards, keys on a keychain, sunglasses, and wallet-sized laminated photos

Add a few props to each purse and wallet. Place them in your dramatic play area or in a special exploration basket.

### Safety Spotlight

**Check loaned/donated purses and wallets very carefully to ensure that they are clean and completely empty. Remove long straps from purses.**

**Avoid small props that are choking hazards. Younger toddlers need very close supervision during this experience.**

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children interact with purses and wallets. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Investigate zippers, snaps, and hook-and-loop fasteners.

Open and close purses and wallets.

Fill and empty purses and wallets. Wallet pockets are especially challenging to empty and fill.

Use purses and wallets to carry things from place to place.

Incorporate purses, wallets, and props in pretend play.

### Helpful Hints

Invite families and friends of your group to donate old purses and wallets. You can also find inexpensive purses and wallets at thrift stores.

## Purses and Wallets (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Introduce and model the words *purse* and *wallet*, as well as names for props.
- Use words to describe what children are doing. “You’re pulling cards out of the pockets of the wallet.”
- Use the words *heavy* and *light*, and *empty* and *full*.
- Notice and describe colors, textures, materials, and sizes of purses and wallets.
- Model and describe how closing mechanisms work. “I grasp the zipper handle and pull it all the way across - ziiiiip!”
- Follow the child’s lead in pretend play.

### Including Every Explorer

If your group includes younger toddlers or children with limited use of hands, include some bags that are especially easy to open, close, and carry. Tape can be used to create tabs that make cards easier to remove from wallet pockets. Laminating film or clear contact paper can make play money, photos, and other delicate materials sturdier and easier to clean.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

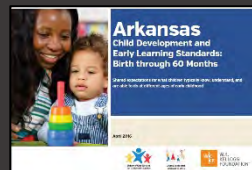
**Cognitive Development – CD 1.2, CD 3.1, CD3.2**

**Physical Development and Health – PH2.1**

**Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1, MT1.2, MT2.1**

**Social Studies - SS1.1**

**Creativity and Aesthetics - CA3.1**



## Dropping In

Let's investigate emptying and filling some more. What can we do with these more complex materials?

### Materials

- ❑ Empty containers to fill such as:
  - Baby wipe boxes
  - Large water jugs
  - Boxes or oatmeal canisters with small holes or slots cut in the lids
  - Snack cups or paint cups with no-spill lids
- ❑ Items to drop into containers such as:
  - Jar lids
  - Large craft sticks
  - Large game chips
  - Old-fashioned wooden clothespins without springs
  - Plastic or wooden pegs

Too many choices can be overwhelming. Start with a collection of similar containers and items, such as several water jugs with a basket of clothespins. You may add variety over time.

You may wish to place a few “starter pieces” in containers for children to discover.

### Safety Spotlight

**Avoid small objects that are choking hazards.**

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children explore the containers and materials. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Drop items into containers.

Peek into container openings. Consider a container from different perspectives.

Try to fit fingers into containers to retrieve items.

Tip, shake, or bang containers to remove items. Try different strategies.

Try to fit new items into containers. Notice that some items do not fit.

Shake a filled container to investigate sounds.

## Dropping In (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Name and describe materials, focusing on words that may be less familiar to children, such as *canister*, *token*, or *clothespin*.
- Use the words *empty* and *full* and *more* and *less*.
- Use action words like *drop*, *press*, and *rattle*.
- Model counting as you drop objects into a container. Count as a child drops objects into a container.
- When a child encounters a challenge, such as a stuck object, do not take over to fix it for the child. Instead, empathize with the child’s frustration while providing time and space for them to solve the problem through trial and error.
- Introduce traditional posting toys such as a shape sorter or wooden “coin box” drawer toy. Two-year-olds may enjoy investigating a toy piggy bank or Connect 4 game set.

### Did You Know?

This sort of play is sometimes called **posting**. Posting involves putting an object into a container by pushing or dropping it through a small opening. For younger toddlers, posting offers a way to explore object permanence. Older toddlers build dexterity as they investigate more complex objects and containers. They stretch their attention span as they work with collections of objects.

### Including Every Explorer

Offer larger objects and containers with wide openings for younger toddlers and children with limited use of hands. Jar lids with a wide-mouthed plastic canister are one possibility.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

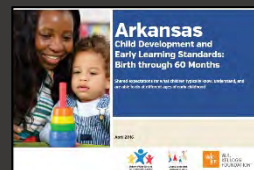
**Social and Emotional Development – SE2.1, SE 3.2**

**Cognitive Development - CD1.1, CD1.2, CD2.1, CD3.1**

**Physical Development and Health – PH2.1**

**Mathematical Thinking - MT1.1, MT3.1, MT4.1**

**Science and Technology - ST1.1, ST2.1, ST3.2**



## Wonder Boxes

Let's investigate a sealed box with only a hand-sized opening. When we feel brave enough to reach inside, what will we find?

### Materials

- Cardboard boxes
- Packing tape and scissors (for adult preparation only)
- Things that fit in boxes, such as soft toy animals, silk scarves, silicone bracelets, or handheld textured sensory balls.

Prepare each box by cutting a round opening that is just large enough for your hand to fit inside. Seal the top and bottom flaps of the box with packing tape. Place an item or a small collection of items in each box. Place the boxes where children can discover them.

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children interact with the sealed boxes. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Tip or shake the box, discovering that something is inside.
Lean close to peek through the opening.
Pick at tape and maybe try to remove it.
Upend or shake the box. Pull flaps. Try different strategies to empty the box.
Reach in to retrieve items by hand.
Reach in to find out whether there are more items inside.
Try to fit new items into boxes. Notice that some items do not fit.

### Helpful Hint

Think about the length of children's arms when choosing boxes. The very best boxes for this activity are small enough for a child to reach the bottom but large enough that they need to stretch out their arm to do so!

## Wonder Boxes (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Ask, “I wonder what is inside?”
- Ask, “What do you see?” or “What do you feel in the box?”
- Describe exactly what you see a child doing. “You’re reaching in... and stretching your fingertips all the way down to the bottom of the box.”
- Name items as a child pulls them from a box. “You found our duck toy! Our duck was in the box.”
- Engage in a guessing game if children invite you to reach into the box. “It feels round. I think it might be a ball. Should I pull it out and see if I’m right?”
- Use describing words. Our box is *closed*. It is *dark inside*.
- Use the words *empty*, *full*, *heavy*, and *light* as you explore alongside children.
- Count items as you or a child take them out of the box or as you drop items in. Wonder aloud about quantity. “I saw you put three blocks into the box, and I’ve taken one...two... blocks out. I wonder how many more blocks we’ll find?”
- Help children understand, empathize, and respond appropriately if a classmate doesn’t want to reach into the box. “He’s not sure yet.”

### Including Every Explorer

Some children may feel unsure about reaching into the dark box. Allow children to approach the box in their own way, at their own pace. Some children may choose to stand nearby and watch others before they feel ready to participate.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

**Social and Emotional Development – SE1.1, SE 2.1, SE 2.2**

**Cognitive Development - CD1.1, CD2.1, CD2.2, CD3.1**

**Physical Development and Health – PH2.1**

**Mathematical Thinking - MT1.1, MT1.2, MT4.1**





## Gift Bag Prop Box

Gift bags are a familiar part of holidays and celebrations. How will we incorporate them into our play?

### Materials

- An assortment of fabric and paper gift bags
- Sheets of tissue paper

Fill gift bags with tissue paper. If desired, you can also place a familiar play object such as a teddy bear or toy truck in each gift bag. Place the bags in your dramatic play area or someplace else where children can investigate them.

### Safety Spotlight

Do not use bags with embellishments like long ribbons, glitter, or small, removable pieces. Provide direct supervision as children interact with bags and tissue paper. Remove small, torn bits of paper.

### Play Possibilities

Watch and listen to notice how children interact with the gift bags. You may see children investigate and play in some of these ways.

Pull tissue paper out of bags.
Shake or crumple tissue paper.
Carry bags around the room.
Empty and fill bags with various play objects.
Notice pictures and words on bags.
Sing "Happy Birthday to You", say "Merry Christmas!", or connect bags to celebrations in other ways.
Pretend to give or receive gifts.

### Helpful Hint

Invite families to donate used bags after birthday parties and other celebrations. Bags that are not suitable for toddlers and twos can be passed on to older groups.

## Gift Bag Prop Box (cont.)

### Interactions to Support Learning

Notice how children show that they want to interact with you. Once children invite you to join in the play, follow their lead. Here are some responses that may be a fit.

- Encourage children to talk about familiar pictures on bags. Point out words on bags if children seem interested. “These shiny, gold words say ‘especially for you.’”
- Describe patterns on bags using words like *stripes*, *polka dots*, and *plaid*. Point out similar patterns on children’s clothing.
- Compare sizes of bags.
- Ask interesting questions that children can think about and/or answer with words or gestures. “How do we know this is a birthday bag?”
- Engage in child-initiated dramatic play. Act surprised and delighted with gifts that children share and model saying “thank you”.
- Offer additional props for two-year-olds to role play familiar celebrations. (For example, birthday hats, silicone muffin cups, and birthday cards.)

### Including Every Explorer

Ensure that holiday bags and other materials align with everyone’s home culture. Bags in solid colors and simple prints are a better choice if you are unsure about which holidays and events are celebrated in children’s homes.

Imaginative play with gift bags is likely to emerge with two-year-olds. While many children this age will enjoy pretending to give and receive gifts, some children may be understandably confused. For example, they may believe that a toy from a gift bag now belongs to them and can be taken home. Consistently explain that “we’re pretending” and watch closely for children who may need your patient, empathetic support.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

**Emergent Literacy –EL3.2**

**Mathematical Thinking - MT 2.1, MT 3.1**

**Social Studies – SS1.1**

**Creativity and Aesthetics - CA3.1**



## Enhancing Our Play Spaces

Toddlers and two-year-olds learn best, and most, through open-ended play.

### **Large Body Play**

Very young children need opportunities to move and engage in active play throughout each day. Our indoor and outdoor spaces include invitations for children to climb, tumble, run, hop, push and pull large things, or use their whole bodies in other ways.

### **Schematic Play**

Children experience play urges to empty or fill containers, gather and carry materials, and interact with play objects in other schema-driven ways. Our play spaces include many open-ended materials, and children have the freedom to use them in their own ways.

### **Sensory Play**

Sensory experiences can be soothing or stimulating. Children often have opportunities to scoop and pour sand or similar materials, dabble with paints, squeeze clay or playdough, crumple and tear paper, and scribble with chalk, crayons, or other tools. Close, responsive supervision is always provided to protect health and safety.

### **Constructive Play**

Children are invited to use blocks and other construction materials for lining and stacking up, for balancing, and for building. There is at least one area in our play space that is especially suited for playing this way.

### **Imaginative Play**

Simple, realistic props encourage children to think about, talk about, and imitate familiar roles and experiences. Children can find collections of materials that go together to enhance and expand their play. Many of these play objects are homelike and authentic.

### **Retreating and Relaxing**

Being a toddler or two-year-old is hard work! Our play spaces include soft, comfortable places where a child can choose to relax, regroup, or recharge.

**When children are interested in boxes, baskets, and bags, we might add or emphasize some of these familiar play materials.**

- Beds and blankets for dolls and soft toy pets
- Boxes and baskets a child can sit in
- Containers to fill and dump
- Nesting cups
- Pots and pans with lids
- Real, empty food boxes, stuffed with paper and sealed with tape
- Shape-sorting boxes
- Wagons or ride-on toys with compartments

## Enhancing Our Daily Routines

Much of our day with toddlers and twos is spent in daily care routines like **meals, toileting and diapering**, and **rest**. Rather than viewing these as chores to be hurried through, we recognize that each daily routine offers many opportunities to strengthen relationships and foster learning.

Here are some ways that we support children during daily care routines.

### Predictable Schedules

We invite children to become familiar with the familiar flow of our day and the steps within each routine. We often talk about what is happening now and what will happen next.

### Nurturing Relationships

We infuse daily routines with warmth and joy. We speak with and touch children gently. We make friendly eye contact and use children's names in positive ways.

### Inquiry and Interest

We notice children's curiosity about the world around them. We provide time for them to look closely at things that seem interesting to them and talk with them about their experiences.

### Growth and Development

We offer opportunities for children to make choices and build self-help skills. We provide unhurried time for children to practice new skills and we recognize that spills, messes, and mistakes are a natural part of the learning process.

**When children are interested in boxes, baskets, and bags, we might notice, investigate, and talk with children about these familiar things that are part of our daily routines. \***



- Food packages, such as cereal boxes
- Diaper bags and baby wipe boxes\*
- Laundry baskets and hampers
- Outdoor backpack, first aid box, or other boxes, baskets, and bags that are important to us\*

**\* Direct supervision required. Children should not have access to any product labeled “Keep Out of Reach of Children.”**

## Baskets, Boxes, and Bags in the World Around Us

Toddlers and twos are often eager to explore their world by going on short walks or going for buggy rides. There are also many interesting things to be seen by looking out a window or through a playground fence. We can sometimes plan special opportunities for children to observe something interesting.

Adults notice what children are looking at or pointing at. We listen to children's questions and describe what children see or what is happening. We might also take photos for children to look at and talk about later.

**Here are some examples of real-life occurrences that could support children's interest in boxes, baskets, and bags.**

- A delivery truck bringing packages
- A mail carrier placing mail in the mailbox
- A garbage truck collecting trash bags from a trashcan or dumpster
- Birds entering and exiting a birdhouse
- Someone gathering eggs or garden vegetables in a basket



## Books About Boxes, Baskets, and Bags

Books are often shared informally with just a few children at a time. Children may also choose to look at books on their own. Two-year-olds may even enjoy a short storytime where almost everyone comes together. If group story times occur, we invite (but do not force) children to join.

Share some of these books and/or your favorite books featuring boxes, baskets, or bags.

*At the Supermarket*, by Anne Rockwell, Henry Holt and Co, 2015

*Big Box for Ben*, by Deborah Bruss and Tomek Bogacki, 2009

*Build!*, by Xavier Deneux, Chronicle Books, 2020

*Dear Zoo*, by Rod Campbell, Little Simon, 2007

*Feast for 10*, by Cathryn Falwell, HMH board book edition, 2003

*Inside Freight Train*, by Donald Crews, Greenwillow Books, 2001

*Not a Box*, by Antoinette Portis, HarperFestival, board book edition 2011

*Please, Mr. Panda/ Por Favor, Sr. Panda*, by Steve Antony, Scholastic bilingual edition, 2015

*Thank You Bear*, by Greg Foley, Viking Books for Young Readers, 2012

*We're Going to the Farmers' Market*, by Stefan Page, Chronicle Books 2014

*What Will Fit?*, by Grace Lin, Charlesbridge, 2020

*Where's Spot*, by Eric Hill, Warne Publishing, 2003

Boxes, baskets, and bags can be spotted in the illustrations of many other picture books, too. Make a habit of noticing them together.

### Talking About Books

- Make Connections: "The girl in this photo is wearing glasses, just like you."
- Look and Point: "Where's the tractor? Do you see it?"
- Predict: "What do you think might happen next?"

Talking with children about books is an essential part of every day!

## Songs, Rhymes, and Games About Boxes, Baskets, and Bags

We sing and share playful rhymes and games with individual children during indoor and outdoor playtimes. We may also use songs or rhymes during transition times between other daily events.

### **Blocks in the Box** – *to the tune of Skip to My Lou*

Sing this song with children as you pick up toys. Substitute the name of other toys as desired.

**Blocks, blocks, blocks in the box,  
Blocks, blocks, blocks in the box,  
Blocks, blocks, blocks in the box,  
Let's tidy up our classroom!**

### **I Wish I Had a Special Box** – *traditional rhyme, adapted*

Try sharing this rhyme with a child who is seated on your lap.

**I wish I had a special box,** (cup hands as if holding a box)  
**Just for my (child's name) friend,** (pat child's knees)  
**I'd take him out, and hug, hug, hug,** (cross arms to hug child's shoulders)  
**And put him back again!** (pat child's knees)

### **Guessing Box** - *with a song to the tune of Are You Sleeping*

Place three familiar objects in a shallow box. Name each one with children. Have children turn their backs or cover their eyes while you remove one of the objects. Hide the object in your lap or behind your back.

Sing, **“What is missing? What is missing? Look and see, look and see.”**

Can children recall which object is no longer in the box?

Once children can easily play with three objects, try four or five objects.

## Songs, Rhymes, and Games About Boxes, Baskets, and Bags (cont.)

### **Way Down Yonder in the Pawpaw Patch** - *an adaptation of the traditional folk song*

A pawpaw is an indigenous fruit that grows on trees in eastern Arkansas. Adapt this Appalachian folk song by using each child's name. As you sing, pretend to pick up fruit and put it in a basket by reaching down to the ground and then clapping your hand against your cupped palm.

Where, oh, where is sweet little Nellie?  
Where, oh, where is sweet little Nellie?  
Where, oh, where is sweet little Nellie?  
Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch.

Picking up pawpaws, putting them in her basket,  
Picking' up pawpaws, putting them in her basket,  
Picking up pawpaws, putting them in her basket,  
Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch.

### **Inside My Basket** - *an adaptation of traditional nursery rhyme, A Tisket, A Tasket.*

Scatter a collectible that children can help gather. Possibilities include plastic Easter eggs, silky scarves, or autumn leaves. In the example below, children collect silk or die-cut paper flowers.

A tisket, a tasket,  
I have a woven basket.  
Come and put,  
A pretty flower,  
Inside my woven basket.

You can also substitute other describing words, such as *purple* or *great big*, for the word woven.

### **Jack in the Box**

Crouch down and bounce up in this simple game.

**Jack in the box**, (crouch down low)  
**Jack in the box**, (crouch even lower)  
**1...2...3...POP!** (count slowly on your fingers to build anticipation, then pop up playfully, spreading your arms wide)



## Moving On

1. With your teaching partners, think about, and discuss:
  - What new experiences have our children had during this exploration? What new knowledge and skills have emerged?
  - Do the children seem ready to conclude this exploration? Have their questions been answered? Is their interest waning? If children are still excited about boxes, baskets, and bags, consider ways to continue and extend the exploration.
  - How will we share the story of children’s learning with families and others?
2. Model gratitude by creating thank you notes for families, school members, and/or community members who supported your exploration. For example, you might invite children to finger paint freely on a “thank you” poster for kitchen staff who saved cardboard cartons for your investigation.
3. Where will you go next? Use your observations of children as you think about and plan your next exploration!

