

Meaningful
Literacy
Experiences
for Ages 2-5

The Story Next Door

Explore. Imagine. Share.

5 Activities
to Inspire
a Love of
Storytelling!



[THEGROACADEMY.COM/BLOOMROOM](https://thegroacademy.com/bloomroom)



Notice
Stories



Imagine
Stories



Build
Stories



Share
Stories



Preserve
Stories



Building skills. Growing hearts. Blooming futures.



Welcome to The Story Next Door

Have you ever wondered what stories are waiting just around the corner?

This week, we'll discover that every neighborhood is filled with stories—from the books we read together to the places we visit, the people we meet, and the experiences we share. Along the way, we'll listen closely, ask thoughtful questions, imagine new adventures, and create stories of our own.

As we read, talk, play, and explore together, we'll build language, strengthen friendships, and celebrate the unique stories that make every community feel like home.

Let's turn the page and discover **The Story Next Door!** 📖💜

with listening hearts,
the gro academy
team

All content created by The Gro Academy is aligned with WMEELS developmental domains and NAEYC developmentally appropriate practices to support whole-child learning.

Home Extension: Neighborhood Story Walk

Discovering stories in everyday places.

About This Activity:

Stories are waiting everywhere—even in the places we pass each day. During this neighborhood walk, children and their grown-up will notice interesting places, ask thoughtful questions, and imagine the stories behind what they see. Through shared conversations and creative thinking, they'll discover that every neighborhood is filled with stories worth telling.

Materials:

- My Neighborhood Story Passport
- Optional clipboard or notebook
- Crayons or pencil

Instructions:

1. Explore your neighborhood or another familiar place with a grown-up.
2. Pause whenever you notice an interesting place, object, or landmark.
3. Talk about what you see by asking questions, sharing observations, or imagining who might visit or what might happen there.
4. Choose one favorite place and tell its story using your own words.
5. Complete your My Neighborhood Story Passport by drawing your favorite place and recording your ideas together.

Infant & Toddler Adaptation:

Keep the walk short and follow your child's interests. Name objects you see, point out familiar places, and encourage simple words or gestures to communicate observations. Focus on enjoying the experience together rather than completing the journal.

Developmental Connections:

- **Approaches to Learning:** Observes details in familiar places • Asks questions about the surrounding environment
- **Literacy & Language:** Uses descriptive language during conversations • Shares observations, experiences, and imagined stories
- **Social & Emotional:** Listens respectfully to others' ideas • Connects personal experiences with familiar places



My Neighborhood Story Passport

A WALK. A LOOK. A STORY TOGETHER.

Date of Our Walk:

I found a place with...



a home



a tree



a mailbox



flowers or plants



a place to play



something that made me smile

Draw Your Favorite Place



What story lives here?

What do you think happens here?



Tell someone about this place.

Who might come here?
What might they do?



One thing I noticed...



Every place has a story.
Every story matters.



THE
GRO
ACADEMY



STORY EXPLORER
PASSPORT

STORY STAMP

Today's Story Adventure



☐ I noticed something new.



☐ I shared a story.



☐ I listened to someone else's story.

My Story Stamp



Thank you for exploring stories together!

The Neighborhood Lost & Found

Imagining the stories behind everyday treasures.

About This Activity:

A mysterious Neighborhood Lost & Found Box has appeared in the classroom! Inside are everyday objects waiting to be claimed—but no one knows who they belong to. As children discover each item, they'll ask questions, imagine possibilities, and work together to create stories about the people who may have lost them. Along the way, they'll build language, practice perspective-taking, and discover that even ordinary objects can hold extraordinary stories.

Materials:

- Neighborhood Lost & Found Box (basket, shoebox, or small bin)
- 3–5 everyday objects from the Neighborhood Lost & Found Kit
- Story Prompt Cards
- Open floor space
- Optional extension materials (blocks, dramatic play props, books, or a classroom map)

Instructions:

1. Place three to five objects inside the Neighborhood Lost & Found Box before inviting the children to gather together.
2. Introduce the box by explaining that these everyday treasures have been found around the neighborhood, but no one knows who they belong to or what story they have to tell.
3. Invite one child to choose an object from the box. Encourage the group to carefully observe what they notice before making any guesses.
4. Read the matching Story Prompt Card aloud and invite children to imagine who the object belongs to, where it may have come from, and what might have happened.
5. Turn the Story Prompt Card over and complete the featured Story Challenge together, encouraging every child to contribute ideas in their own way.
6. Continue exploring additional objects, reminding children that every story can have many different possibilities and that everyone's ideas help build the story.

Continue →

Continuing the Story

Every object in the Neighborhood Lost & Found Box invites children to think in a different way. Some stories may inspire dramatic play, while others encourage building, movement, conversation, or exploration. There are no right or wrong answers—each child brings their own ideas, experiences, and imagination to the story.

Use the Story Prompt Cards as flexible invitations. Follow children's curiosity, ask open-ended questions, and enjoy watching their ideas grow.

Facilitator Tips

- Encourage children to build on one another's ideas instead of searching for one "correct" answer.
- Celebrate different perspectives by asking, "What makes you think that?"
- Allow children to revisit favorite objects throughout the week and discover how stories can change over time.
- Add new objects to the Neighborhood Lost & Found Box whenever children's curiosity begins to grow.

Infant & Toddler Adaptation:

Offer just two or three familiar objects at a time, such as a stuffed animal, shoe, or hat. Encourage children to name the object, describe what they see, and talk about who might use it. Adults can model simple stories using short phrases like, "The bunny is looking for its friend," while inviting toddlers to act out finding, carrying, or caring for the object. Focus on conversation, pretend play, and shared exploration rather than creating complete stories.

Developmental Connections:

- **Approaches to Learning:** Uses imagination to generate ideas • Demonstrates flexible thinking while exploring different possibilities
- **Literacy & Language:** Uses descriptive language during conversations • Asks and answers questions • Contributes ideas to shared storytelling
- **Social & Emotional:** Listens respectfully to others' ideas • Explores different perspectives • Demonstrates empathy by imagining others' experiences

1 STUFFED BUNNY



Who misses me?

STORY CHALLENGE

ACT IT OUT

TRY THIS

Pretend the stuffed bunny has finally been found! Decide who discovers it, who it belongs to, and what happens when it is returned. Use your faces, voices, and movements to bring the story to life.

TALK TOGETHER

- How do you think the bunny felt while it was lost?
- How did its owner feel when it was found?
- What happened next?

2 KEY



What do I unlock?

STORY CHALLENGE

BUILD IT

TRY THIS

Use blocks, loose parts, or recycled materials to build the special place this key unlocks. Imagine who uses this place and what makes it important.

TALK TOGETHER

- Who uses this key?
- What happens inside?
- Why is this place special?

3 LIBRARY CARD



Which story did I borrow?

STORY CHALLENGE

FIND IT

TRY THIS

Visit the classroom library and choose a book you think belongs with this library card. Share why you chose it before reading together.

TALK TOGETHER

- Why would someone borrow this book?
- Who do you think read it?
- What might they have learned?

4 MITTEN



Where do I belong?

STORY CHALLENGE

MAP IT

TRY THIS

Place the mitten on a classroom or neighborhood map. Decide where it was found and imagine the journey it took before someone discovered it.

TALK TOGETHER

- Where do you think it was lost?
- Who found it?
- Where will it go next?

5 FLOWER



Who picked me?

STORY CHALLENGE

SHARE IT

TRY THIS

Imagine why someone picked this flower. Act out giving it to a friend, family member, or neighbor and explain why it was shared.

TALK TOGETHER

- Who received the flower?
- How did it make them feel?
- When have you shared something kind?

6 BIRTHDAY INVITATION



Who is invited?

STORY CHALLENGE

PRETEND PARTY

TRY THIS

Pretend to attend the celebration on this invitation! Decide where the party is, who is hosting it, and what fun things happen at the party.

TALK TOGETHER

- Who is celebrating?
- What will you do at the party?
- What is your favorite part of a celebration?

7

RECIPE CARD



What delicious meal was I part of?

STORY CHALLENGE



PRETEND IT

TRY THIS

Use the dramatic play kitchen to make the meal from this recipe. Decide who made it, who it was for, and how it made everyone feel.

TALK TOGETHER

- Who made this recipe?
- Who was the cooking for?
- How did they feel when they shared the meal?



8

RAIN BOOT



Where was I going?

STORY CHALLENGE



MOVEMENT ADVENTURE

TRY THIS

Create a movement path for the rain boot's adventure. Where did it go? What did it see along the way?

TALK TOGETHER

- Where do you think the boot went?
- What did it see or do there?
- How did the adventure end?



9

TOY CAR



Where will I go today?

STORY CHALLENGE



CREATE A JOURNEY

TRY THIS

Build or draw a road for the toy car's trip. Decide where it starts, where it stops, and what happens along the way.

TALK TOGETHER

- Where is the car going?
- Who or what does it see on the way?
- Where does it stop and why?



10

POSTCARD



Where have I been?

STORY CHALLENGE



IMAGINE THE TRIP

TRY THIS

Imagine the special place this postcard comes from. Describe the sights, sounds, and people there. What made it a place worth remembering?

TALK TOGETHER

- Who sent this postcard?
- What did they see there?
- What did they love most about their trip?



11

PUZZLE PIECE



Where do I belong?

STORY CHALLENGE



FINISH THE STORY

TRY THIS

Help this puzzle piece find its perfect match. Create the rest of the puzzle or imagine the big picture it belongs to.

TALK TOGETHER

- What do you think the picture is?
- What does this piece fit?
- What happens in the big picture?



12

SUNGLASSES



Who do I belong to?

STORY CHALLENGE



BE THE CHARACTER

TRY THIS

Put on the sunglasses and become the person who owns them! What do they love to do? Where do they like to go?

TALK TOGETHER

- Who wears these sunglasses?
- What are they like?
- What adventures do they go on?



EVERY TREASURE HAS
A STORY TO TELL

LOST & FOUND

Every treasure has a story
waiting to be discovered.

Can you help each object
find its story?



STORY DETECTIVE BADGES

Wear your badge. Use your clues.
Help every object find its story!

TEACHER TIP

Use these badges to invite children to take turns leading the storytelling. Every detective has important ideas to share!



STORY DETECTIVE

I notice.
I wonder.
I imagine.



STORY DETECTIVE

I notice.
I wonder.
I imagine.



STORY DETECTIVE

I notice.
I wonder.
I imagine.



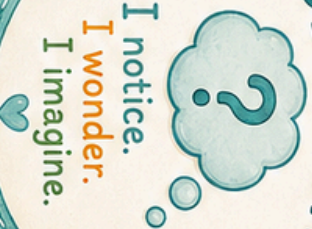
STORY DETECTIVE

I notice.
I wonder.
I imagine.



STORY DETECTIVE

I notice.
I wonder.
I imagine.



STORY DETECTIVE

I notice.
I wonder.
I imagine.



BLANK STORY PROMPT CARDS

Add your own treasures and create endless stories!

HOW TO USE:
Write or draw the object. Then choose a story question and challenge that will spark wonder and conversation in your classroom.



1 OBJECT: _____

♥ WHO AM I? ♥

STORY CHALLENGE:

TRY THIS: _____

TALK TOGETHER: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

2 OBJECT: _____

♥ WHO AM I? ♥

STORY CHALLENGE:

TRY THIS: _____

TALK TOGETHER: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

3 OBJECT: _____

♥ WHO AM I? ♥

STORY CHALLENGE:

TRY THIS: _____

TALK TOGETHER: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

4 OBJECT: _____

♥ WHO AM I? ♥

STORY CHALLENGE:

TRY THIS: _____

TALK TOGETHER: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

5 OBJECT: _____

♥ WHO AM I? ♥

STORY CHALLENGE:

TRY THIS: _____

TALK TOGETHER: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

6 OBJECT: _____

♥ WHO AM I? ♥

STORY CHALLENGE:

TRY THIS: _____

TALK TOGETHER: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

Windows Into Stories

Discovering that every window tells a different story.

About This Activity:

Sometimes, the smallest detail can spark the biggest story. Using Story Windows, children explore neighborhood scenes one small section at a time, noticing clues, sharing observations, and imagining what might be happening beyond the frame. As each full picture is revealed, children discover how different perspectives can lead to different stories—and that every observation helps us understand a little more.

Materials:

- Story Window Frames (printable)
- Neighborhood Scene Cards (included in the Activity Kit)
- Wonder Question Cards
- Pocket chart, easel, or open floor space for displaying scene cards
- Optional clipboard and crayons for drawing favorite discoveries

Instructions:

1. Display one Neighborhood Scene Card where all children can eventually see it, but begin by inviting them to explore only small sections using their Story Windows.
2. Give each child a Story Window and encourage them to slowly search the picture for interesting details.
3. Pause often and invite children to share what they notice before asking what they think might be happening in the story.
4. Use the Wonder Question Cards to encourage conversation, prediction, and respectful listening as children build on one another's ideas.
5. Reveal the entire picture and compare it to the children's predictions. Talk about how seeing more of the picture changed—or confirmed—their thinking.
6. Repeat with additional Neighborhood Scene Cards, celebrating that every child may notice something different and that every observation adds to the story.

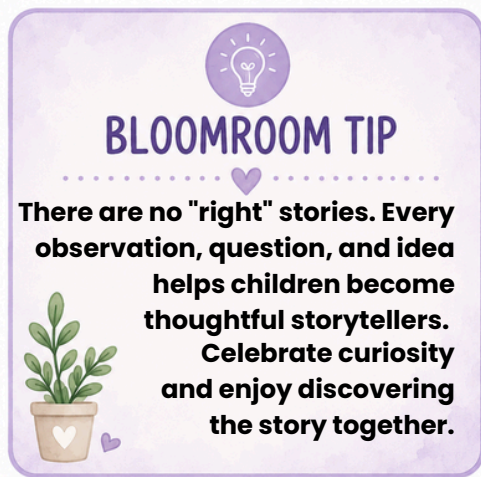
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Facilitator Tips

- Encourage children to build on one another's ideas instead of searching for one "correct" answer.
- Celebrate different perspectives by asking, "What makes you think that?"
- Allow children plenty of time to observe before revealing the full picture.
- Remember that noticing different details is part of the learning—not a mistake.

Infant & Toddler Adaptation:

Offer one neighborhood picture at a time and invite children to explore it with a Story Window alongside an adult. Encourage pointing, naming familiar objects, and responding to simple questions like, "What do you notice?" Expand children's observations with rich language and celebrate every discovery without expecting a "correct" answer.



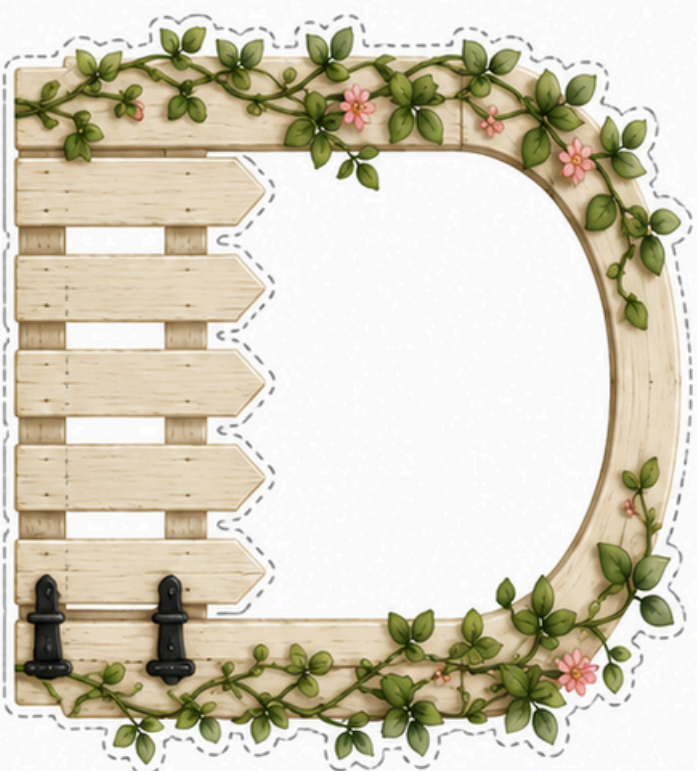
Extending the Experience:

- Invite children to create their own Story Windows using classroom photographs.
- Revisit the same scene later in the week to see if children notice something new.
- Encourage children to photograph interesting places outdoors and use them as future Story Window scenes.

Developmental Connections:

- **Approaches to Learning:** Demonstrates curiosity by closely observing details
• Uses flexible thinking to revise ideas as new information is revealed
- **Literacy & Language:** Uses descriptive language to share observations • Listens and responds to the ideas of others • Makes predictions using visual clues
- **Social & Emotional:** Respects different perspectives • Builds confidence when sharing ideas • Develops empathy by considering how others might experience the same place

Story Windows









THE
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Bloom Room
by The Gro Academy









Observation & Conversation Guide

HELPING CHILDREN BECOME THOUGHTFUL OBSERVERS

Children naturally notice different things. There are no right or wrong answers. Slow down, wonder together, and let conversations grow from what children discover.



👁️ Notice

Encourage careful observation before jumping to conclusions.

- What do you notice first?
- What catches your eye?
- What tiny details do you see?
- What surprised you?
- What do you notice now that you didn't notice before?



💭 Wonder

Invite children to think beyond what they can immediately see.

- What do you think happened here?
- What might happen next?
- Why do you think that?
- What else could be true?
- What questions do you have?



💖 Connect

Help children relate the scene to their own experiences.

- Have you ever seen something like this?
- Does this remind you of somewhere you've been?
- What would you do if you were there?
- How do you think the children are feeling?
- What would you say to them?



📖 Imagine

Stretch storytelling and creative thinking.

- Give this picture a title.
- Tell the story from a different point of view.
- Pretend you're one of the children.
- What happened just before this moment?
- What do you think will happen tomorrow?



🌱 Extend

Keep the learning going beyond the picture.

- Draw what happens next.
- Build the scene with blocks or loose parts.
- Act out the story together.
- Create your own Observation Print.
- Find something similar outside.



🌿 BloomRoom Tip 💖

Different children notice different things—and that's something to celebrate.

Rich conversations happen when we slow down, listen with curiosity, and make room for many different ideas. Instead of looking for one "right" answer, encourage children to explain their thinking and build on one another's observations.



Build a Neighborhood

Creating a place where every story belongs.

About This Activity:

Children work together to build their own neighborhood using blocks, loose parts, and natural materials. As they create homes, parks, roads, and gathering places, they imagine who lives there, how neighbors help one another, and the stories that happen each day. This collaborative building experience encourages creativity, problem-solving, communication, and imaginative play.

Materials:

- Wooden blocks or building bricks
- Loose parts (wood slices, stones, bottle caps, sticks, fabric pieces)
- Toy people and animals
- Toy vehicles
- Recycled boxes or small containers
- Natural materials (twigs, leaves, pinecones, flowers)
- Story Places (included)
- Optional: clipboards, paper, and markers for creating neighborhood signs

Instructions:

1. Arrange the Story Places to create the beginning of a neighborhood.
2. Build around them using blocks, loose parts, recycled materials, and natural items.
3. Add people, animals, and vehicles. Decide who lives, works, or visits each place.
4. Talk together about how neighbors travel, help one another, and use the different spaces.
5. Explore and expand the neighborhood through imaginative storytelling and cooperative play.
6. Take a Neighborhood Tour and invite children to share the places and stories they created.

Facilitator Focus

Offer a small selection of materials to begin, adding more as children's ideas develop. Encourage collaboration by asking open-ended questions and allowing children to solve problems together. Rather than directing the design, follow children's ideas and celebrate the unique community they create.



BLOOMROOM TIP

The richest neighborhoods are built through conversation. Listen for children's ideas, encourage collaboration, and allow the neighborhood to change as new stories emerge.



Conversation Starters

- What does our neighborhood need?
- How do people travel from place to place?
- Where do neighbors like to gather?
- How can we make everyone feel welcome?

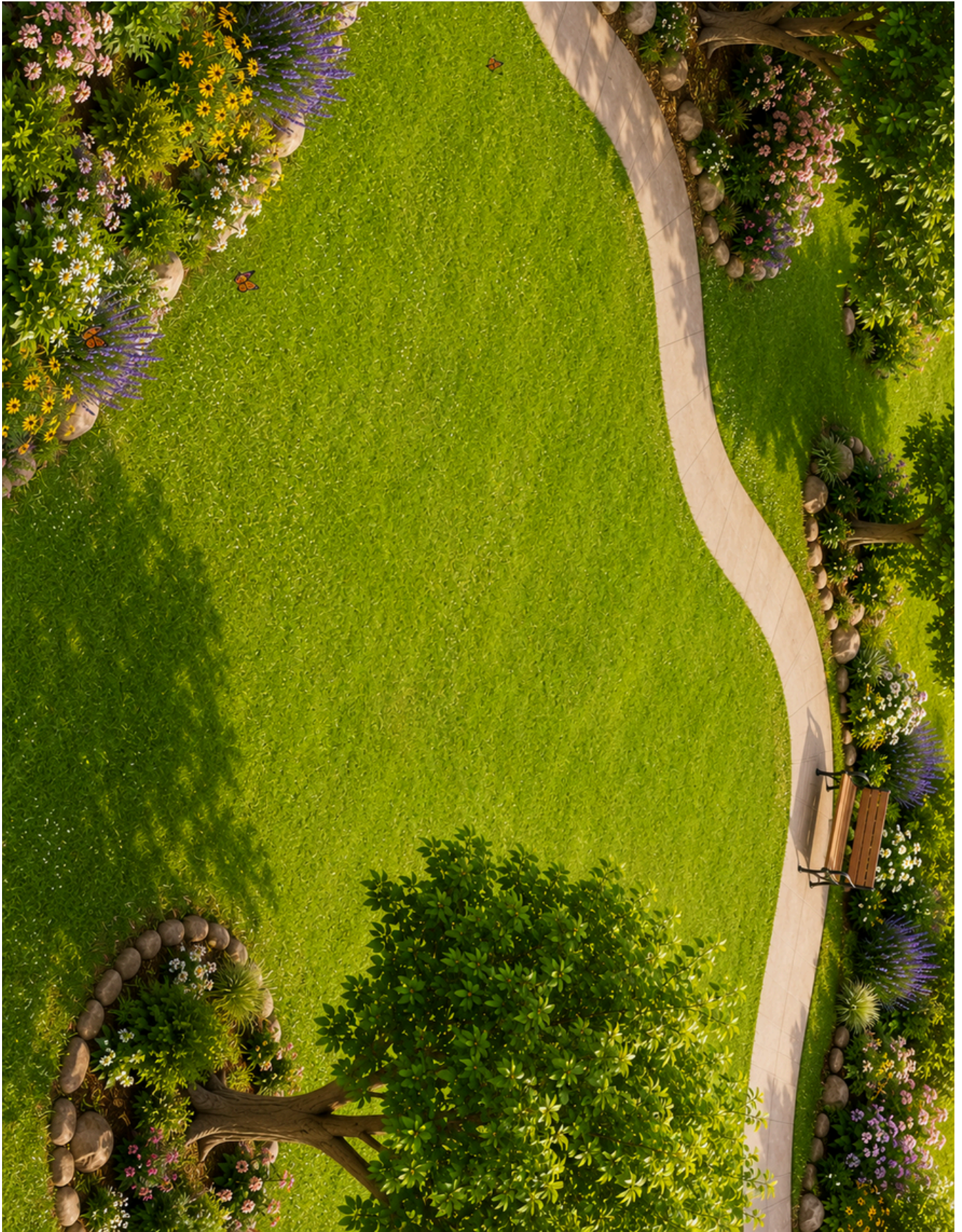
Infant & Toddler Adaptation:

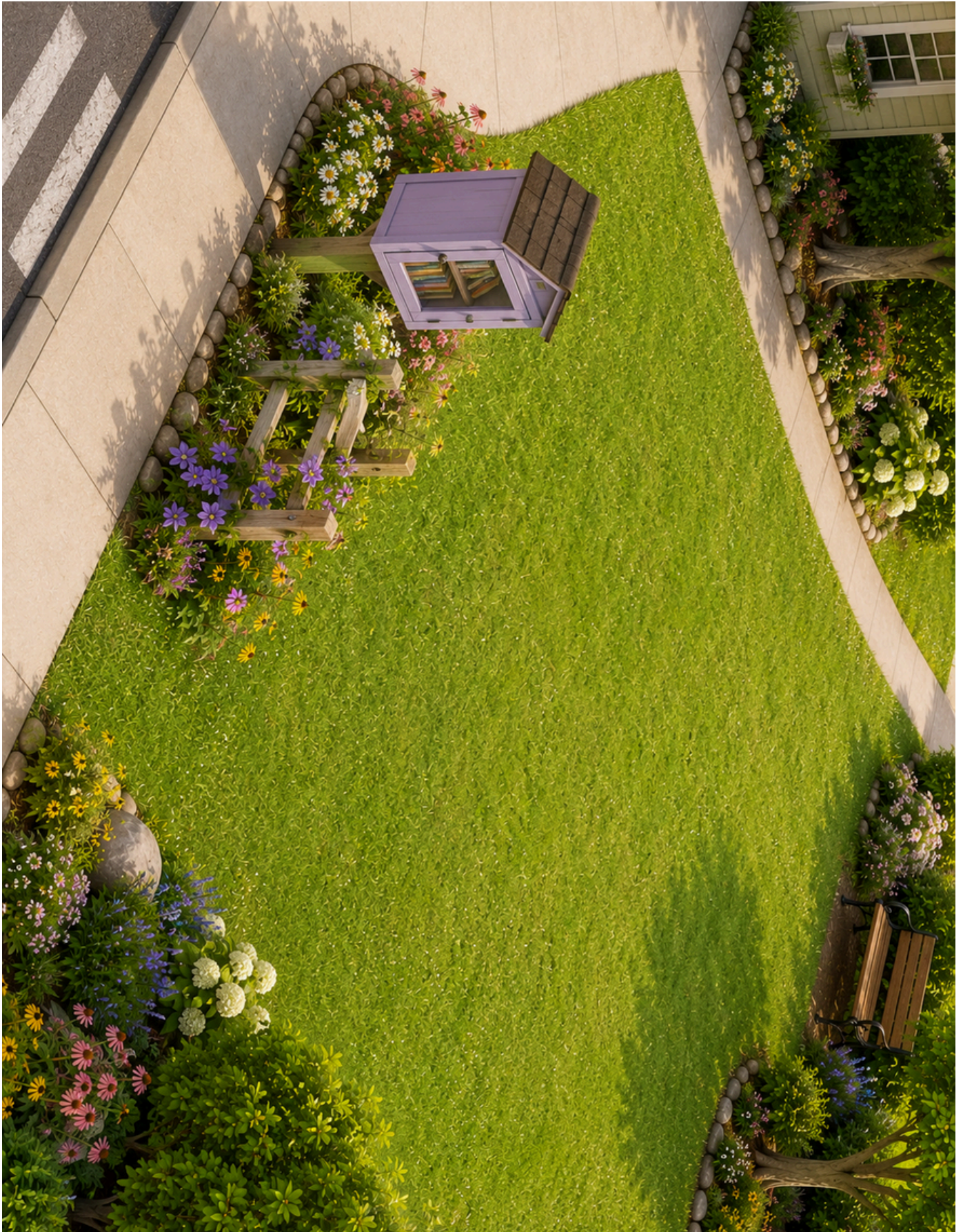
Offer large blocks, chunky figures, and one or two Story Places to explore together. Build alongside children using simple language while encouraging movement, imitation, and imaginative play.

Developmental Connections:

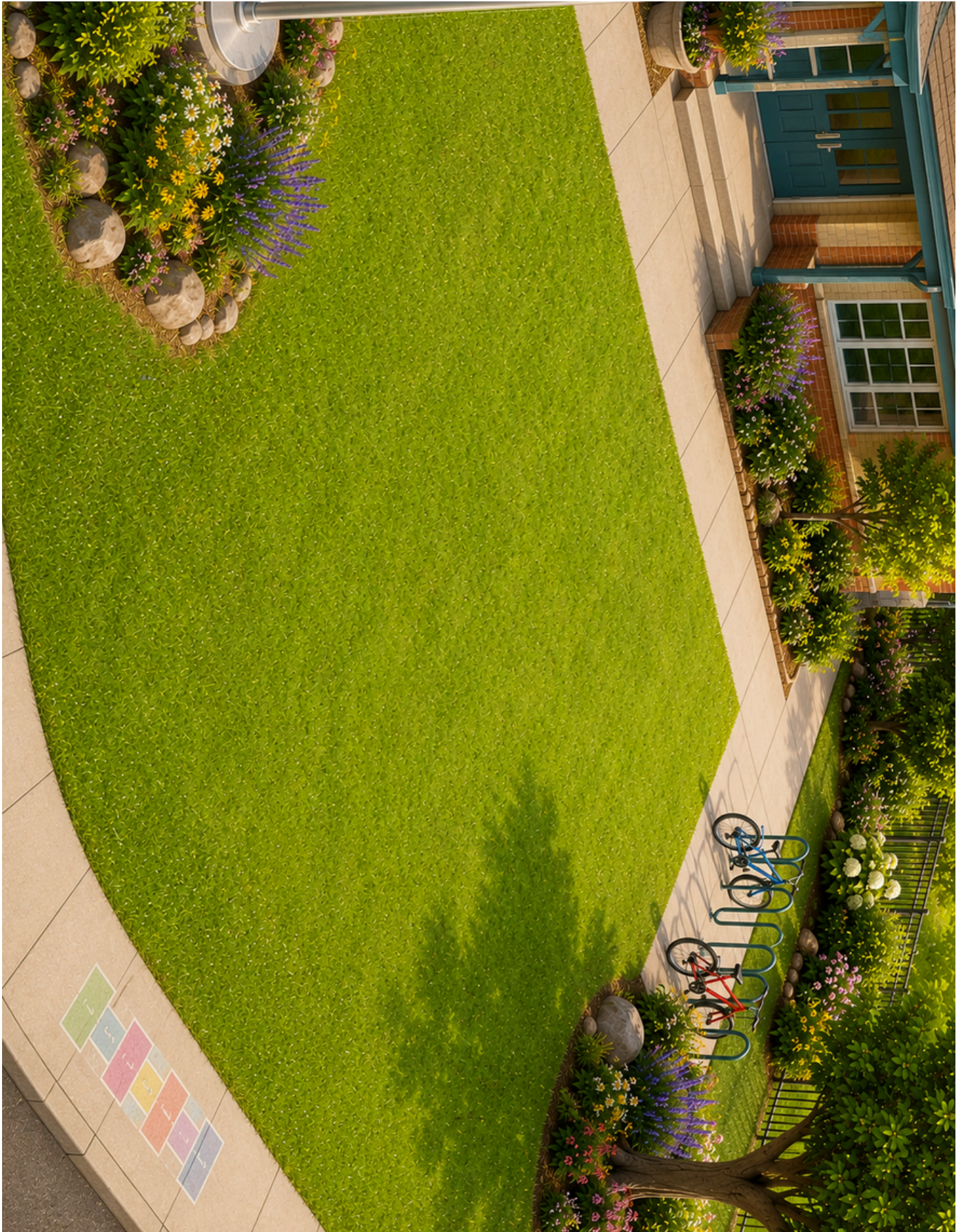
- **Approaches to Learning:** Creativity & Imagination • Persistence • Flexible Thinking
- **Cognitive:** Spatial Reasoning • Planning & Problem-Solving • Understanding Communities
- **Literacy & Language:** Storytelling • Descriptive Language • Collaborative Conversation
- **Social & Emotional:** Cooperation • Perspective-Taking • Shared Decision-Making

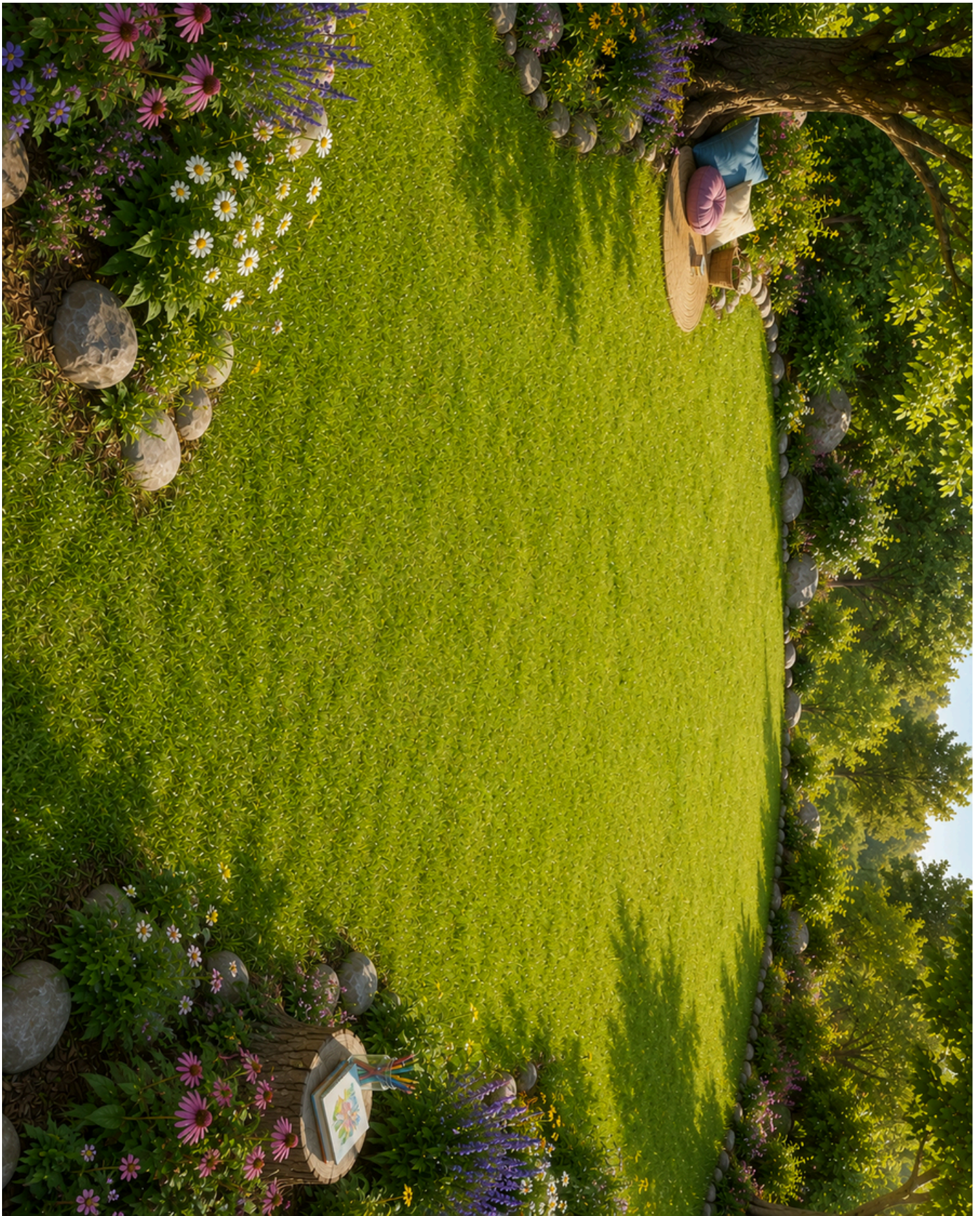












Story Spotlight

Sharing stories from our neighborhood.

About This Activity:

Every neighborhood has stories waiting to be told. Invite children to revisit the neighborhood they built, explore familiar classroom spaces, or imagine a brand-new place through dramatic play. Using simple Story Spotlight props, children become storytellers as they describe places, introduce characters, and share the adventures happening around them. As they listen to one another's ideas and build on shared stories, children strengthen language, confidence, imagination, and a sense of community.

Materials:

- Story Spotlight Kit printables
- Story Places or neighborhood play setup (optional)
- Blocks, loose parts, and dramatic play materials
- Toy people, animals, and vehicles (optional)

Instructions:

1. Invite children to explore the neighborhood they have created or another familiar dramatic play setting.
2. Introduce the Story Spotlight Kit and encourage children to choose a microphone, camera, or Story Spotlight badge as they begin sharing.
3. Encourage each child to choose a place, person, or event they would like to talk about through imaginative play.
4. Follow each child's ideas with open-ended questions, allowing stories to grow naturally through conversation.
5. Invite classmates to contribute new ideas, characters, or events that expand the shared story while respecting one another's contributions.
6. Continue revisiting the neighborhood over several days, allowing new stories to emerge as children's play evolves.

Facilitator Focus

Young children often tell their richest stories while they are actively playing. Rather than directing the conversation or searching for "right" answers, slow down, observe, and follow children's ideas with genuine curiosity. Simple prompts and attentive listening help children organize their thoughts, strengthen communication skills, and discover that their ideas are valued.

Conversation Starters

- Tell me about what's happening here.
- Who are the people in your story?
- What happened before this?
- What do you think might happen next?

Infant & Toddler Adaptation:

Offer a pretend microphone or camera during dramatic play and invite children to share simple words, sounds, or gestures about familiar people and places. Follow their interests by expanding on their language, modeling new vocabulary, and celebrating every attempt to communicate.

Developmental Connections:

- **Approaches to Learning:** Using imagination to develop ideas • Taking initiative during dramatic play • Extending play through storytelling
- **Literacy & Language:** Describing people, places, and events • Building vocabulary through conversation • Listening and responding to others' ideas
- **Social & Emotional:** Sharing ideas with confidence • Taking turns during conversations • Appreciating different perspectives through collaborative storytelling







Tip: These cards are designed for educators and caregivers to encourage open-ended storytelling and meaningful conversations during play.



**Tell me about
this place.**



**Who is here
today?**



**What happened
first?**



**What do you
think will happen
next?**



**How are your
characters
feeling?**



**What
surprised you?**





**Where are
they going?**



**What would you
like to add?**



**Who could
help?**



**What makes
this place
special?**



**What changed
today?**



**What story would
you like to tell
tomorrow?**



Every Story Belongs

Creating a classroom book together.

About This Activity:

Children become authors and illustrators as they contribute their own pages to a shared classroom book. Invite each child to draw a neighborhood place, character, memory, or imagined event and tell the story behind their picture. An adult records the child's words as spoken, preserving each child's unique voice. When the pages are gathered into one book, children see that their ideas matter and that many different stories can belong together.

Materials:

- Every Story Belongs printable book pages and cover
- Drawing paper or cardstock
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils, or paint
- Photos of neighborhood play and creations, optional
- Stapler, binder rings, ribbon, or another binding material

Instructions:

1. Revisit the neighborhood places, characters, and stories children explored throughout the pack.
2. Invite each child to choose a story they would like to add to the classroom book.
3. Encourage children to draw, paint, collage, or select a photograph that represents their idea.
4. Ask the child to tell you about the page and record their words as closely as possible to how they are spoken.
5. Read the words back to the child and invite them to add more details, a title, or their name when developmentally appropriate.
6. Arrange the completed pages behind the book cover and bind them together.
7. Read the finished book as a group, pausing to notice how each contribution makes the neighborhood story richer.
8. Place the book in the classroom library so children can revisit, retell, and share their stories with others.

Facilitator Focus

The goal is not to produce polished drawings or perfectly structured stories. Give children time to develop their ideas in their own ways and resist correcting their language as they dictate. Recording children's words faithfully communicates that their voices are worthy of being remembered while helping them understand that spoken ideas can become written text.

Conversation Starters

- What story would you like to add to our book?
- Tell me what is happening in your picture.
- Who is part of this story?
- What would you like readers to remember?

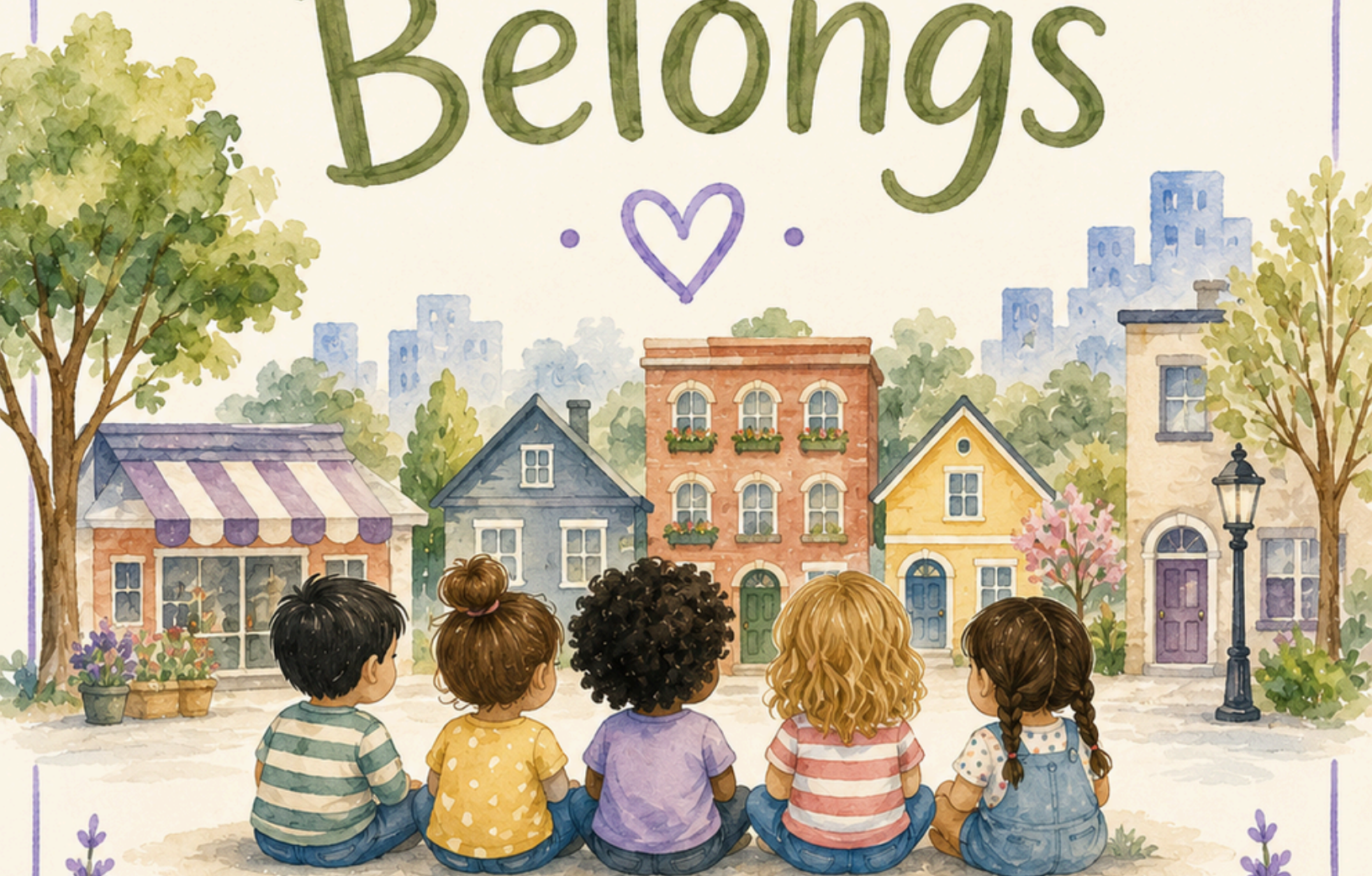
Infant & Toddler Adaptation:

Invite infants and toddlers to make marks with chunky crayons, add fingerprints or paint, choose a photograph, or point to familiar people and places. Describe what they notice and record a few words, sounds, gestures, or observations connected to their contribution. Their page can remain simple while still giving them a meaningful place in the shared book.

Developmental Connections:

- **Approaches to Learning:** Choosing and developing an original idea • Persisting while creating a page • Revisiting earlier experiences through storytelling
- **Health & Physical:** Using drawing and art tools with increasing control • Coordinating hand movements to create meaningful marks and details
- **Literacy & Language:** Expressing ideas through drawing and dictation • Connecting spoken words with written text • Retelling experiences with descriptive language
- **Social & Emotional:** Developing pride in individual contributions • Listening respectfully to classmates' stories • Recognizing that different voices and experiences belong together

Every Story Belongs



A classroom book by



My Story



My story:

(Your teacher will write the words you tell.)

Handwriting practice lines consisting of solid top and bottom lines with a dashed middle line. There are four sets of these lines for writing practice.

By: _____



My Story



Photo of my
neighborhood adventure

(Add a photo here.)

My Story



My Illustration



By: _____



My Story



My Story



My Illustration



By: _____



About Our Authors

This book was created by the children
of our classroom.

Every page shares a different idea, memory,
or *imagined story*.

Together, our stories remind us that
every voice matters and every story belongs.



Class: _____

School: _____

Teacher: _____

Date: _____