

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Using Art, Literacy, and Dramatic Play to Teach Nutrition

Topic Area: Nutrition and Meal Management
Subtopic Area: Happy Mealtimes

Objective: Recall three areas to incorporate nutrition in the early childhood curriculum for preschoolers.

Introducing young children to a variety of foods is a great way to help them develop healthy eating habits from the start. Not only does it introduce them to different flavors and textures, but it can also teach them how to choose more “anytime” foods (e.g., fruits and vegetables) than “sometime” foods (e.g., cookies and chips) later in life. One way to help children develop healthy eating habits is to incorporate nutrition into the early childhood curriculum. Here are three areas with ideas to incorporate nutrition in your early childhood curriculum using art, literacy, and dramatic play.

Art Activities

- Create a food-of-the-week collage: Create a list of foods for 52 weeks and request old magazines from the local library, a doctor’s office, or a recycling center. Each week, work with children to locate the food in old magazines, printouts, newspapers, or other sources. Help them cut (or tear) out the food item and paste (or tape) it to a poster board. Once finished, post the collage in the classroom at a child’s or parent’s view.
- Create a food mobile: Show children pictures of a particular food and discuss its features. Encourage them to paint the food. Punch a hole in each painting and attach a string. Then, hang the food pictures from a coat hanger to make a food mobile.
- Create food art placemats: Use colorful paper for children to draw and color different foods. Laminate their drawings to use as placemats at meals.
- Create food art: Using fresh fruits and vegetables, create characters children can relate to. For example, create Puppy Dog Toast with wheat toast (face), almond butter (spread to add definition to the face), banana slices (ears and nose), and blueberries (eyes). Another option is to use cookie cutters to cut unique shapes out of whole-wheat toast, pita, or English muffins. Decorate each shape with toppings like an apple or seed butter, vegetable pieces, fresh or dried fruit, or other available nutritious toppings.



Reading and Literacy Activities

- At least once a week, read a book about nutrition and food to the children.
- Invite a local farmer or librarian to read books about food during storytime.
- Host a “bring your favorite food book to preschool” day.
- Purchase a variety of food-themed books and place them in the classroom library or reading area. Some examples might include *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, *Cooking up a Story* by Carol Elaine Catron and Barbra Catron Parks, or some old favorites like *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, or *Peter Rabbit*.
- Host a “read-a-thon” for children, staff, and parents with a set number of nutrition-related books.

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Using Art, Literacy, and Dramatic Play to Teach Nutrition

Topic Area: Nutrition and Meal Management
Subtopic Area: Happy Mealtimes

Activities

- Buy play food, dishes, and other props and place them in the dramatic play area.
- Incorporate child-friendly cookbooks with picture recipes for pretend meals and prepare them with children.
- Include a variety of dress-up clothes, such as a chef's hats and aprons for pretend play.
- Post a variety of posters of different foods, such as fruits, vegetables, meats, and grains.

Incorporating food and nutrition through art, literacy, dramatic play, and other areas of the classroom is a great way to help children develop healthy eating habits. Remember to choose activities that are age-appropriate, safe for children with food allergies, and safe for consumption. Also, if planning to prepare food for children to eat, always wash hands properly. For a variety of nutrition-related activities, refer to the USDA Nutrition Education for Preschoolers web page at <https://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/nutrition-education-preschoolers>.

References:

Katzen, Molly. (2018). *Children's cookbooks*. Retrieved from <http://www.molliekatzen.com/kids.php>

Michigan State University. (2015). *The art of creating: Why art is important for early childhood development*.

Retrieved from https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/the_art_of_creating_why_art_is_important_for_early_childhood_development

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *Nutrition education for preschoolers*. Retrieved from <https://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/nutrition-education-preschoolers>

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service through an agreement with the Institute of Child Nutrition at the University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

The University of Mississippi is an EEO/AA/Title VI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA Employer.

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights; Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

© 2019, Institute of Child Nutrition, The University of Mississippi, School of Applied Sciences

Except as provided below, you may freely use the text and information contained in this document for non-profit or educational use with no cost to the participant for the training providing the following credit is included. These materials may not be incorporated into other websites or textbooks and may not be sold.

The photographs and images in this document may be owned by third parties and used by the University of Mississippi under a licensing agreement. The University cannot, therefore, grant permission to use these images.