

## Learning activities with parent volunteers in the classroom

Parent volunteers are a wonderful resource for the early childhood classroom. The value they add to the program and to children's learning is enormous. More can be achieved with the assistance of parent volunteers than without.

Effective use of the parent volunteer's time requires a certain amount of organisation and preparation. There is little point in a parent volunteer turning up at a scheduled time if you are unprepared. Similarly, there is little value in a parent appearing at the door during class time and asking, "Can I help?"

## Utilising parent volunteers

The involvement of parent volunteers will depend upon their availability and your class program. Not every parent is able to offer regular assistance in the classroom.

Parent volunteers can be especially valuable when organising group work in subjects such as literacy and maths, assisting with art lessons and outdoor activities or in the computer lab.

Parents may also assist with administrative-type roles such as changing reading books and checking sight words.

Some parents welcome the opportunity to share a special skill or information related to their interest, hobby or employment that the children are learning about. A doctor may be willing to talk to the children when learning about health. An artist may like to demonstrate techniques and guide children in an activity. Others may like to share information about their family's culture and traditions. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination and the availability, skills, and interests of parents.

Parents may also be willing to do things at home, such as

- Cut out laminated cards and pictures
- Prepare materials for art and science lessons
- Make playdough or glue
- Fold paper envelopes
- Make tubes for threading from pages of magazines
- Cover books

It is always great to have the assistance of parents during classroom celebrations or on excursions. Additional supervision helps to minimise risks and ensure events flow smoothly.

### This resource includes suggestions for:

- Organising the timetable to identify where support can be utilised
- Requesting parent help
- Scheduling volunteers
- Preparing activities
- Things to remember

### Organise the timetable

Identify lessons in which the assistance of parent classroom volunteers will be beneficial, for example:

- literacy groups
- maths groups
- art lessons
- outdoor activities
- computer lessons in the lab.

Take into consideration other assistance that may be available; for example, teacher aides or support personnel.

Plan how your lessons will be structured and how you will utilise parent support.

### Request parent help

Send a letter to parents requesting assistance at specified times. Explain the purpose of the support required; for example, for reading groups. Include requests for other assistance such as changing reading books or preparation of materials.

(Refer to page 4 for a sample letter)

### Scheduling volunteers

When you have details of all support available, finalise the structure of your lessons for the week.

Send parents an acknowledgement of their offer of support and inform them of times you have scheduled their assistance.

(Refer to page 5 for a sample acknowledgement)

### Preparing activities

To make best use of parent volunteers in the classroom, it is essential to be well prepared. With instructions for a variety of activities printed, laminated and stored for easy access, it is a simple matter to gather required resources prior to the lesson.

### Reading groups

Involve parents in activities such as:

- playing a sight words or phonics game (for example; Bingo or Bang! – refer to page 5)
- completing an activity to follow up a book read in class or in a guided reading lesson with the teacher; for example paint a picture, add collage items from the story, glue labels to match the items
- following a procedure such as [How to make a paper plate cat face](#) (search for other suitable [procedures](#))
- introducing a new book (refer to page 6 and 7 for sample activities at two different levels)
- reading to children – a picture book from the reading corner, or related to class work
- listening to children read – books from their book boxes
- playing a game that involves reading (it may support learning in another curriculum area too)

\*Note: If you use PM or Literacy Links readers, I have many activities already prepared. Contact me for details.

## Maths groups

It is great to involve parents in playing games with children. Through carefully chosen games, children can practise their mathematical learning while learning important social skills. Games can be indoor or outdoor, purchased or teacher made.

A variety of games suitable for maths groups are available in the readilearn collection, including [Snakes and Ladders](#), [Pass the Bag of 3D shapes](#), and [Games for maths groups #1](#). (Search 'maths groups' or check out [Games and Puzzles](#) for other suggestions.) These games include instructions that can be printed and laminated to explain the activity to parent volunteers.

## Art lessons

Parents can be wonderful assistants in both setting up and cleaning up for art lessons. They can be used as an additional pair of hands in a whole class lesson or to supervise a small group activity.

## Computer lab

An extra pair of hands can be useful in the computer lab to provide assistance with logging on, repairing accidents or explaining processes.

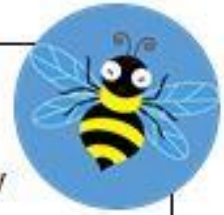
## Things to remember

- Parents are busy people too. They are forgoing other activities when they commit to assisting in your classroom. Welcome them, acknowledge the value of their contribution, and show appreciation for the effort and commitment they have made.
- Parents are not teachers. They do not have the training that you have. Do not give them a teaching role or expect them to intuitively know what to do. You must provide explicit instructions.
- It is usually not possible to give detailed verbal instructions during class time, so prepare written explanations that parents can read through, perhaps when you are organising the children.
- It helps to be consistent with the types of activities you ask of parents. They are more comfortable if they know what to expect.
- The activities need to be enjoyable for the parents as well as the children. If they don't enjoy what you ask of them, they may not come back.
- Involving parents in your class program is an exercise in public relations and helps build community. It is important to be professional, warm, and appreciative. Others will soon get to know about your classroom environment and your interactions with the children. Ensuring it is a positive experience for all will increase your support in the school community.

An additional consideration: Will the parent work with the child's group? There is always a range of factors to consider but young children love to work with their parents at school and parents want to know that the time they are contributing is helping their child.



# Sample



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

The assistance of classroom volunteers is always welcome and greatly appreciated for the value it adds to our class program.

If you are available to help, either in the classroom or with "preparation" of resources at home, please complete the following form and return it to me as soon as possible. If you have any special talents or skills to share, please let me know.

Be aware that I may not require assistance during all sessions, but would like to gauge parent availability before finalizing my program.

Many thanks in anticipation,

Class teacher

✂ -----

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Child: \_\_\_\_\_

I can help out on these days and times: (please ✓)

	9.00 – 10.00	10.00 – 11.00	11.45 – 1.15	1.45 – 2.45
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

- My special skills are: \_\_\_\_\_
- I am unable to help out in the classroom but can help with preparation at home.
- I am unable to help out at this time.



# Sample



Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your willingness to assist in our class program.

I have scheduled for you to help with reading groups on Mondays from 10 am until 11 am, starting next week.

I look forward to seeing you then.

Best wishes,

Class teacher



## How to play Bang!

**Prepare** a set of sight words or letters on cards approximately 15 cm x 3 cm. Include four cards with the word “Bang!” in each set. Ensure all cards are the same colour. Choose words the children are learning or should know. Between ten and twenty is a good number.

Place all the cards into a tin or spread them face down on the table.

Children take turns to choose a card. If they can identify the sound for the letter or read the word, they keep the card. If they take a Bang! card, they return all their cards to the tin.

The child with the most cards when time is up or all cards are taken is the winner.

But everyone is a winner because they have fun and learn at the same time.

# Sample

## Two caption books – *Little Things and Big Things*

Spend about 10 minutes on each.

Look through the books first yourself to see what sort of things are in them and to familiarize yourself with the sentence structures: "My \_\_\_\_\_ is little." "A \_\_\_\_\_ is big."

### *Little Things*

1. Sit the children in a circle where they can all see the book. Show them the cover and tell them that it is called "Little Things". Point to the words as you do so.
2. Tell them that the little boy is telling the little girl about things he has that are little. Ask them what those things could be and what little things might be in the book. Encourage many different responses. It doesn't matter if their suggestions are in the book or not.
3. Ask children in turn to tell something they have that is little, using the sentence structure "My \_\_\_\_\_ is little."
4. Tell the children that you are going to read the book together. Hold it up so all can see. Re-read the title on the cover and then on the title page. As you turn each page, ask the children what is little, then have them read the page with you as you point to the words.

### *Big Things*

Repeat the process for this book.

1. Show the cover and the title. Tell them that all the things in the book are big machines. Ask them to suggest what big machines might be included.
2. Ask each child in turn to tell something they have or know that is big, using the sentence structure "A \_\_\_\_\_ is big."
3. Once again, hold up the book so that all can see it. Re-read the title on the cover and then on the title page. As you turn each page, ask the children what is big, then have them read the page with you as you point to the words.

Point out that in *Little Things*, the boy tells the girl about things he owns. He says "My \_\_\_\_\_ is little." In *Big Things* the sentence says, "A \_\_\_\_\_ is big."

Ask children to identify the words *My, is, little, A, big* on the pages of the books.

### Follow-up (if time permits)

Show the children the word "big" and "little". Ask them to write the words in their scrap books and draw a picture to show something that is big, and something that is little.

# Sample

## Sam and the Waves

Children need **writing books and pencils**.

1. Sit the children in a circle and give each child a book. Have them look at the cover and talk about the picture, predicting what the story might be about. Have them read the title. Discuss whether they think Sam will like the waves or not. Does she look happy? What about the illustration – does it look like waves at a beach they have visited?
2. Have the children look through the book and discuss what happens in the pictures on each page (do not read yet). Discuss – Did Sam like the waves at the beach? Why or why not? Where else did Sam find some waves? Did she like those waves? Why or why not?

Now the children will read through the book silently to find out the answers to questions. For each page, ask the question, then have the children read the page to themselves. When they have finished reading the page, invite one child tell the answer and read the part of the text that gives the answer.

### Page 3:

- What did Sam and Mum do at the beach?

### Page 5:

- What did Sam see?
- Point out the word **big**, and discuss why it may be in **bold** type.
- Ask a child to read the words that Sam said. Discuss the inverted commas “. . .” and explain that they show the words that were said. They should read only the words inside the inverted commas.

### Page 7:

- How did Sam feel about the waves? How do you know? Read the words she said that tell you.
- Have the children point to the first word and the last word that Sam said. Discuss the inverted commas again.

### Page 9:

- What did Mum think about the waves?
- Where did Mum say they would go?
- What did Sam and Mum do then?
- Have a child read the words that Mum said. Point out the use of the inverted commas again.
- Read “The waves **are** big, today,” stressing the word **are** which is in **bold** type. Ask the children why the word is in **bold** (Mum agrees) and have them read the sentence, stressing the word. Have them read the sentence again, stressing a different word each time; for example, waves, big, and today. Discuss the differences in meaning according to which word is stressed.

### Page 11:

- What did Sam see?
- Have a child read the question that Sam asked. Discuss the inverted commas and question mark.
- Have the children try reading the question placing the emphasis on a different word each time. Discuss how the emphasis changes the meaning slightly.

### Page 13:

- What did Mum tell Sam she could do?
- Why did Mum think it was okay for Sam to go in the water?
- What did Sam see? How did she feel about it? (excited) Read the sentence in an excited voice. Then read it in a scared voice. How else could you read it? (angry, proud, scary etc)

### Page 15:

- What did Sam do in the water park? Did she like it? How do you know? (illustration)
- What did Sam have for the picnic?

### Page 16:

- What did Sam like about the waves in the water park?

Discuss water parks the children have been to and things they went on. Which ones did they enjoy? Which ones did they find scary? Have them write about one they liked, and one they didn't. Have them write words they said (or would say) about it and use inverted commas to show those words. If there is time they can draw a picture to illustrate it.