

This book belongs to

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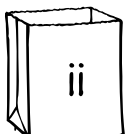
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Developing a Theme with Learning Centers

There are many advantages to developing themes through tasks in the learning centers already established in your classroom. Tasks are added to the learning centers to reflect what you are studying.

Use these guidelines to develop the tasks to reflect your theme:

That Are Motivating to the Children

Tasks

Choose tasks that are interesting to the children, ones that allow work for a meaningful amount of time. Tasks in learning centers may be done many times. The best test for meaningful tasks is if the children want to go back to them again.

That Provide Real Experiences

Tasks

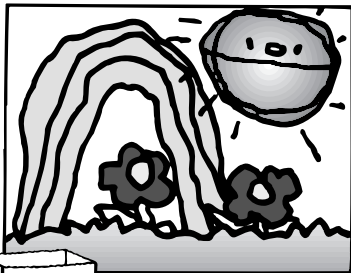
Develop tasks that will provide real experiences about the theme. Children need to feel as if every task that they work on has a purpose. Meaningful tasks are ones where the child can stay with the work for a sustained amount of time. These tasks will keep children engaged and develop deeper understanding about the theme.



That Allow Children to Construct Knowledge

Tasks

Tasks should be developed that allow the children to begin with what they think they know about a theme and build on that knowledge to develop deeper understandings. One way children construct new knowledge is from conversations with other children about their work. Consider tasks that encourage children to discuss what they are doing.



Tasks

That Have a Process and a Product

The product is an important way for the child to show what he or she has figured out in the process. Whether it is an art piece, writing or some other creation, the product serves as the indication that the child has figured out something which can be shown to others.

Designing Meaningful Starting Points for Themes

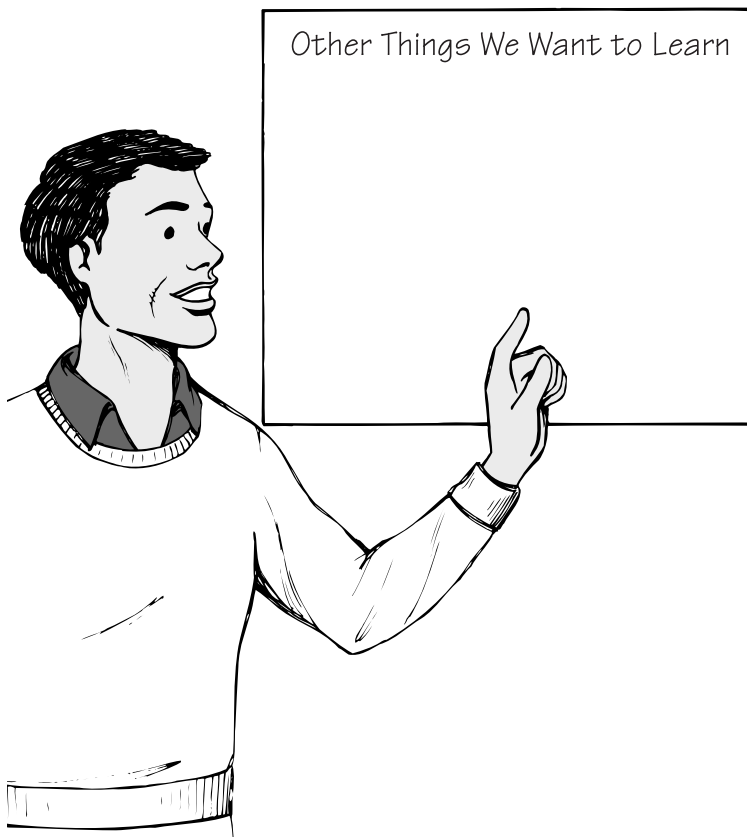
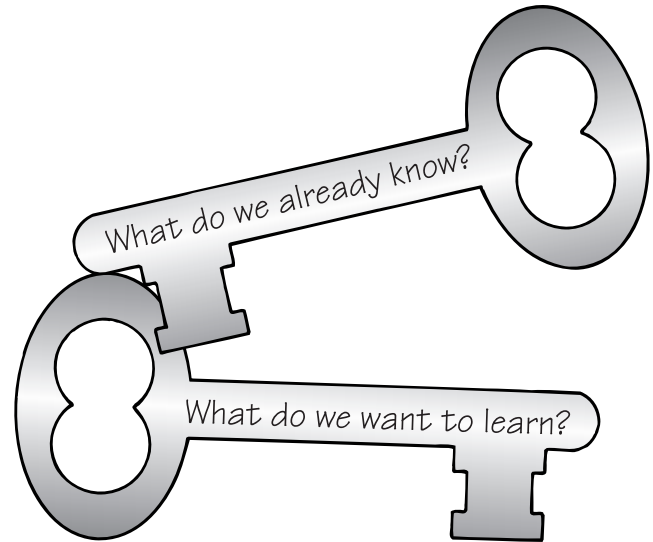
Starting Point

Think broadly about a starting point. Traditionally books have been used to introduce a theme. But what could be designed that would give you feedback about what information the children bring to the theme? Create a scenario that has mystery, something memorable that you will be able to refer to throughout the theme. The starting point should be unexpected with an element of surprise.

The starting point should lead to a discussion that results in gathering information around the key areas:

What do we already know?

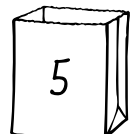
What do we want to learn?



Print the information on large charts with the heading listed at the top. As each child contributes information for the charts, transcribe their words and the child's name.

Post the charts in a place that is at the eye level of the children. Plan to leave the charts posted throughout the theme and refer to them often. When the children discuss information they have learned from a task they have completed, relate it to the chart to help them connect what they're learning.

Add a third chart with the heading *Other Things We Want to Learn*. Add information that is acquired throughout the theme.



Starting Point for the Grocery Store Theme

Ask a friend or relative to dress in clothes a farmer might wear. For example, overalls, a hat and a bandanna. Buy a variety of fruits and vegetables that are grown in your area and place them in a basket. Have the "farmer" sit in a chair in an area of the room where the children can gather on the floor nearby. Place the basket of fruits and vegetables on the floor next to the farmer.

When the children enter the room, invite them to sit in front of the farmer and make the appropriate introductions. Ask the farmer to role-play a person who is trying to find the nearest grocery store to take the food to sell. Have the farmer show the children some of the products in the basket and talk briefly about how they grow. For example, he might say, "I have a lovely grove of apple trees, and this is one of my finest crops in years."

Ask the farmer to ask the children if they can help him locate the nearest grocery store. Encourage the children to share information about the local grocery stores, and then suggest that they could help the farmer by drawing a map. Pass out art paper and crayons to the children and ask them to draw maps to help the farmer. The children may work alone or in pairs.

After the farmer has left the classroom, tell the children that you were impressed with how much they knew about the grocery store. Tell them that the visit from the farmer made you think that it would be interesting to study more about grocery stores.

On the top of a sheet of chart paper print *Things We Know About the Grocery Store*. Ask the children to contribute to the list. Print each response on the chart paper. Make a second chart that has the heading *Things We Want to Know About the Grocery Store*. Follow the same procedure by contributing questions the children have about the workings of a grocery store. Mount both charts in a place in the classroom where they can be used as a reference throughout the theme.

