

This book belongs to

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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

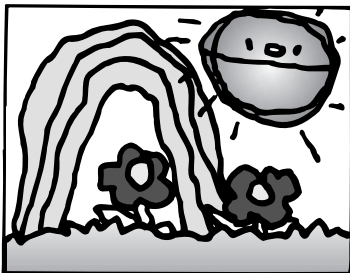
Develop tasks that will provide real experiences about the theme. Children need to feel as if every task that they work on has a purpose. Meaningful tasks are ones where the child can stay with the work for a sustained amount of time. These tasks will keep children engaged and develop deeper understanding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

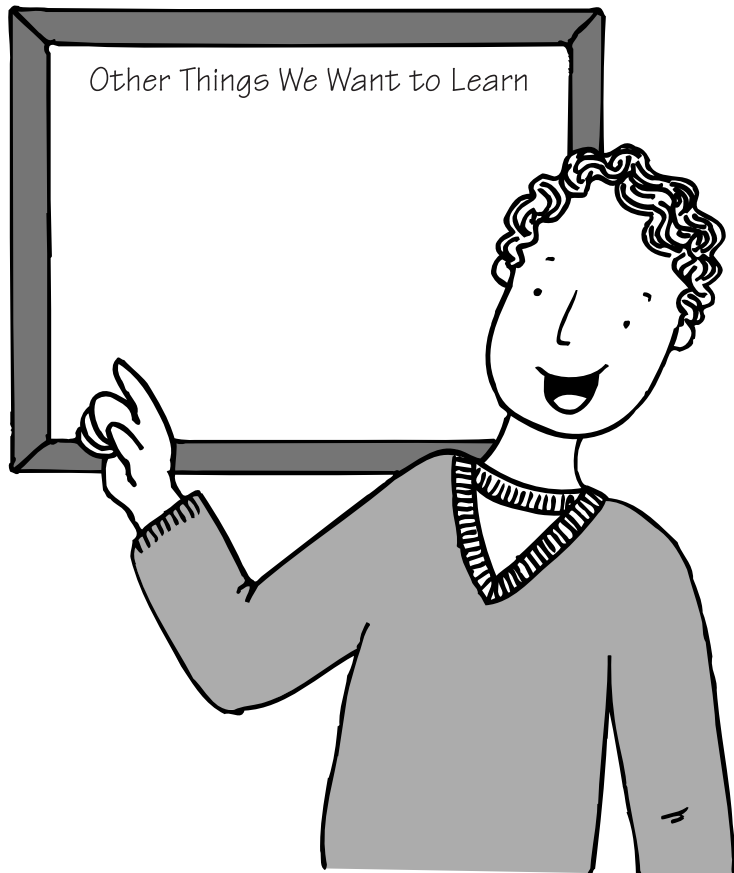
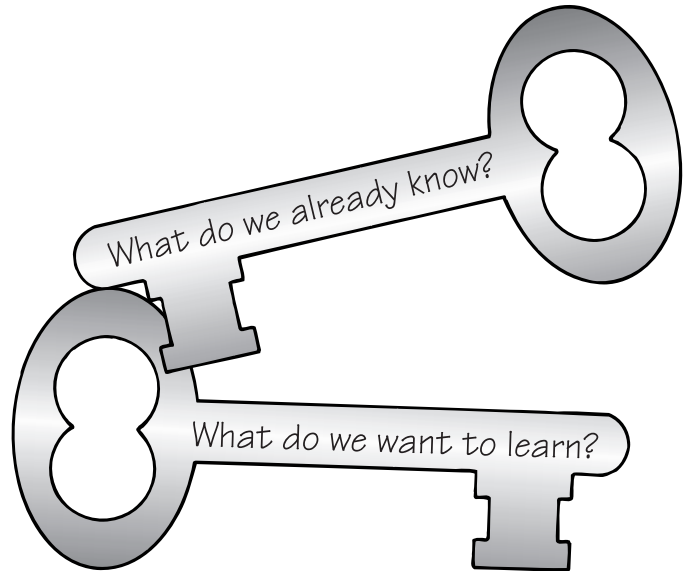
Starting Point

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 his or her 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 Construction Site Theme

Choose a construction site in which to make a video. Record a home being built in the neighborhood, a crew working on a new section of a roadway or a renovation of a commercial building. Talk with the foreman to explain your interest and obtain his or her permission to make a video. Record some of the equipment in use at the construction site. Include the workers to show what they are wearing and the kinds of tools they are using. If possible, interview one or two of the workers. Ask questions about the clothing they wear for work, their jobs on the site and what safety precautions they take while they are working.

Gather the children together and tell them that you had an opportunity to make a special video tape about some people at work. Show the video to the children.

Lead a discussion about what they saw on the video. Begin a list of the various aspects of the job on the construction site. Include on the list pieces of equipment the children can identify. Encourage them to speculate about what the purpose of the equipment is for the job.

Watch the videotape again and, afterwards, ask the children to make drawings of what they are most interested in learning more about. Encourage the children to add details to their drawings and for older children to add a few words or sentences to their drawing to express their ideas.

Discuss the drawings and make a list on chart paper of the things the children would like to learn about construction work. Post the drawings and the charts so that they may be referred to throughout the theme.

