

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

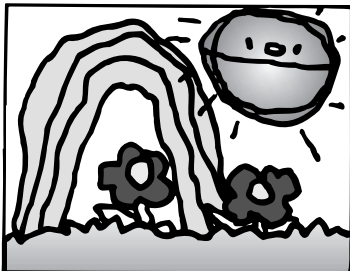
Develop tasks that will provide real experiences about the theme. Children need to feel as if every task that they work on has a purpose. Meaningful tasks are ones where the child can stay with the work for a sustained amount of time. These tasks will keep children engaged and develop deeper understanding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

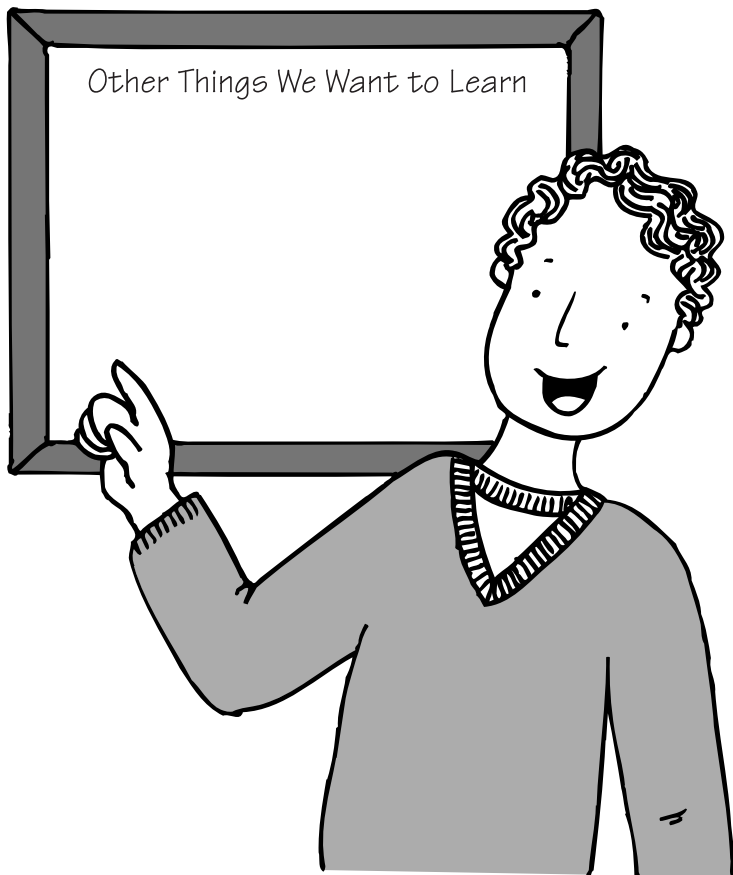
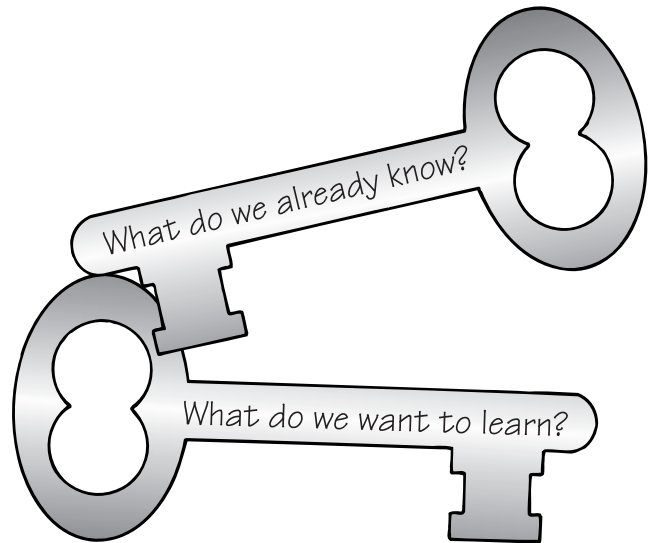
Starting Point

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 Office Theme

Remove the existing furniture and other supplies from the Dramatic Play Center. Place a chart stand, chart paper and markers in the center.

Gather the children in the Dramatic Play Center. Lead a short discussion about what is missing in the center. Ask the children to discuss where their parents go to work. Make a list of their responses on the first sheet of chart paper.

Divide the children into small groups. Provide each group with an office supply catalog, a large sheet of paper, scissor and glue. Ask the children to work together to locate items in the catalogs that they would need to create an office in the Dramatic Play Center. As the materials are located, they are cut out of the catalog and glued to the paper.

When each group's charts are complete, gather the children to review the charts. Lead a discussion to look for similarities among the items listed on the charts. Encourage the children to add information that they know about the uses for various items and the type of work that requires some of the things on their list.

Bring in a box with a few of the items you have gathered for the theme. (See the list on page 27.) Suggest that during the time when children are working in the class learning centers, they may choose to begin to set up an office in the Dramatic Play Center using the materials that you have gathered. (See page 19 for additional information about the setup of the Dramatic Play Center.)

Encourage the children to add more items they make or bring from home to add to the office. Introduce each new item in a class meeting. Ask the child to tell the purpose of the item.

