Literacy Activities for Any Time

Dr. Seuss stories are full of invitations to build literacy skills. Rhyming words teach vowel sounds, reinforce spelling patterns, build sight vocabulary, and more. Lively language enriches learning about word choice, syntax, and conventions of language. Colorful characters keep the stories going and offer opportunities to explore dialogue, onomatopoeia, alliteration, story structure, and more.

Mystery Words

The rhyming words in Dr. Seuss stories make them perfect for activities that build sight vocabulary. Try this mystery word activity to help children make connections between the language they hear and the words they see.

- After sharing a Dr. Seuss story, write pairs of sentences on sentence strips. Use a large sticky note to cover one of the rhyming words at the end of a line.
- Together, read the lines aloud, pointing to each word as you say it.
- When you get to the covered word, ask children to predict what the word is. Lift the sticky note to let them check their guesses.

Skill-Building Displays

Use Dr. Seuss stories as inspiration for playful displays that build vocabulary and enhance writing skills. Following are several ideas:

- Ask children to be on the lookout for words that sound like their meaning. Some examples are *oom-pahs*, *toots*, and *chirp* (from *Horton Hears a Who!*) and *plop*, *bump*, and *thump* (from *The Cat in the Hat*). Build a word wall with such words and introduce the term *onomatopoeia*. Children can illustrate the word wall to add visual clues.
- Invite children to listen for alliterative language in the story. After reading, revisit some of the alliteration in the story. Let children have fun saying the words with emphasis on the repeating sounds—such as "Ben bends Bin's broom," from *Fox in Socks*. Create a display for children to post favorite alliterative lines. Encourage them to use the display as a writing resource.
- Let students practice the conventions of dialogue in their writing by playing with some of the dialogue from Dr. Seuss stories. Copy dialogue on sentence strips. Cut apart the quotation marks, punctuation, and dialogue tags. Use Velcro to attach the pieces to tagboard. Place the materials at a center, and let children put sentences together to show who says what.

Tip

Encourage a playful approach to language by exploring rhyming dictionaries and online rhyming resources with students.

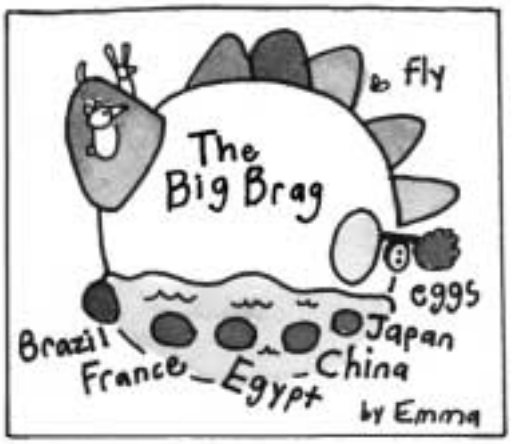
- ***Scholastic Rhyming Dictionary*** by Sue Young (Scholastic, 1997). This child-friendly reference book is organized by vowel sounds and final syllables and features more than 15,000 words.
- ***RhymeZone*** (www.rhymezone.com). This site makes it easy to rhyme with even the toughest of words. Find fun rhymes for easy words, too—for example, type in *cat*, and choose from more than 200 rhyming words, including *hat*, *gnat*, *rat-a-tat*, and *little brown bat*!

Guess Who!

Dr. Seuss stories feature some of the most memorable characters in children's literature. There's Horton, who lives in the Jungle of Nool, the Cat in the Hat and his trademark tricks, Sam and his green eggs and ham, the Sneetches—both the Star-Belly and Plain-Belly sort, Yertle the Turtle whose kingly ambitions go a little too far, and more. Explore the characters in various Dr. Seuss stories with this guessing game:

- Invite children to choose a favorite character. Ask children to pretend to be that character and write a set of clues that describes who they are. Have them start with general clues and get progressively more specific—for example, *I live in a jungle. I like to swim. I have a trunk. I have big ears. I am determined. I searched a big field of clovers for my small friends. I found them on the last clover and kept them safe.*
- Let children take turns reading aloud their clues one at a time, giving classmates a chance to guess their identity after each clue.

Story Maps



Creating a map of a story challenges children to make connections between characters, setting, and events.

- Have children brainstorm characters and places in a story. List these on the chalkboard or chart paper.
- Model the activity by making a map that incorporates children's suggestions. Then let children make their own map, generating a list of characters and places for a Dr. Seuss story and incorporating them in a map.
- Have children use what they know about the setting to make inferences and fill in the details of a map. For example, in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, the boy describes what he sees on his way to and from school. The school is never pictured, but children can infer that he arrives and include the school on their map.

The Dr. Seuss Picture Dictionary

Learn about all sorts of words—even the made-up kind—with this activity.

- As you share Dr. Seuss stories, have children look for words the author makes up—for example, *moof*, *miff-muffered*, *gruvvulous*, *rippulous*, *snergelly*, and *snarggled* (all from *The Lorax*). Write the words on chart paper.
- Invite children to choose a word from the list to add to a picture dictionary. Have them write the word on paper, illustrate it, and then write a definition. Then have children help arrange the pages in alphabetical order. Bind with O-rings or paper fasteners so it's easy to add new pages.

Green Eggs and Ham

(Random House, 1960; renewed 1988)

Children will be chanting along to familiar words in this persuasive story as Sam tries with unrelenting persistence to convince his friend to try green eggs and ham.

Before You Read

Direct children's attention to the character on the cover of the book. Judging from the facial expression, what does this character think about green eggs and ham? Let children imitate the expression. What are some words to describe the feelings that go with this face?

After You Read

Discussion Starters

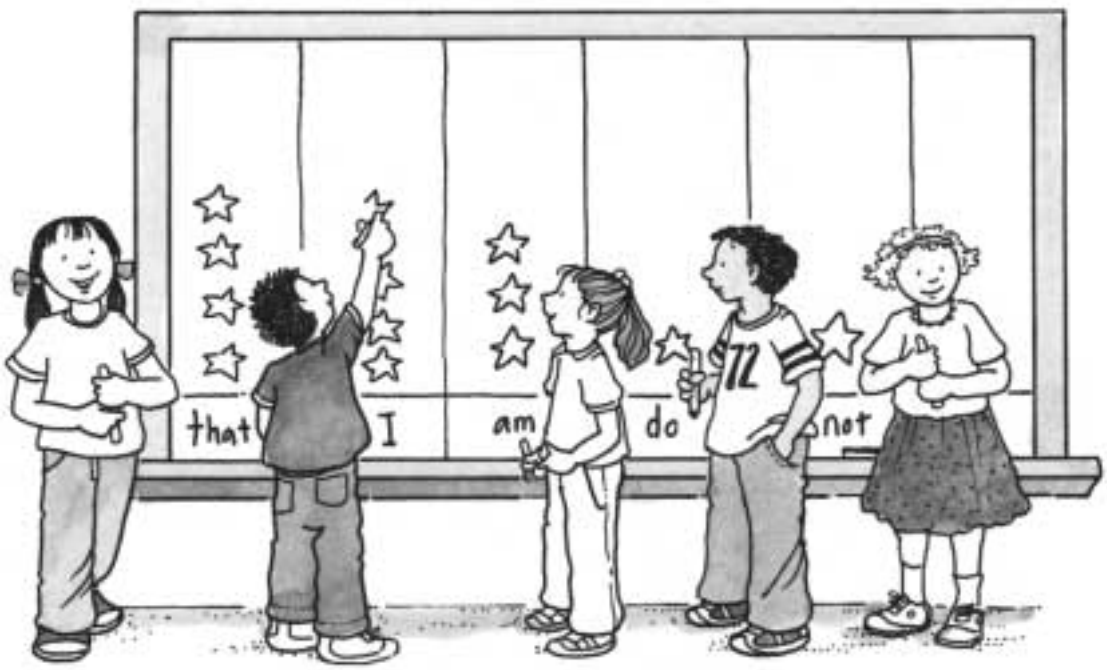
Children will want to talk about one thing when they finish reading this book—what it would be like to eat green eggs and ham. Keep the discussion going with questions that explore the way authors develop characters—on the inside and on the outside:

- At the beginning of the story, which character looks happy? (*Sam, page 3*) Which does not? (*the one on page 4*) How does this help you make a prediction about the story?
- What are some words that describe how the character in the tall black hat feels at different parts of the story? (*Revisit the illustrations, noticing that this character looks annoyed, worried, confident, angry, surprised, and even—eventually—happy.*)
- What are some of the ways Sam tries to convince his friend to eat green eggs and ham? Why do you think he doesn't give up?
- What are some words that describe a person like Sam? (*determined, persistent, stubborn*)
- How do you think both characters are feeling at the end of the story? How do you know?

Counting On Sight Words (Language Arts and Math)

In the first four short lines of this story, children will encounter six words on the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary list (*that*, *I*, *am*, *do*, *not*, *like*). And two of those words appear three times each! As children commit some of the words in the story to memory, they can match them with the printed words, in time learning to recognize this sight vocabulary in other places and building reading fluency. To reinforce sight word recognition, combine a read-aloud of the story with this graphing activity.

- Choose a number of sight words that appear in the story—for example, *that*, *I*, *am*, *do*, and *not*.
- Write each word in large letters at the bottom of the chalkboard. Draw vertical lines between each word to create a graph.
- Assign children to each word. Have children stand next to their words at the chalkboard.
- Reread the story. Have children make a star (or write the word) in their column each time they hear it.
- Let children at the chalkboard take turns with a pointer, leading the class in reading each sight word as many times as it was noted. Count the number of times children heard each word and compare. Which word did they hear most often? Have them order the sight words, from most frequent to least frequent. Repeat the activity with a new set of sight words and a different group of children.



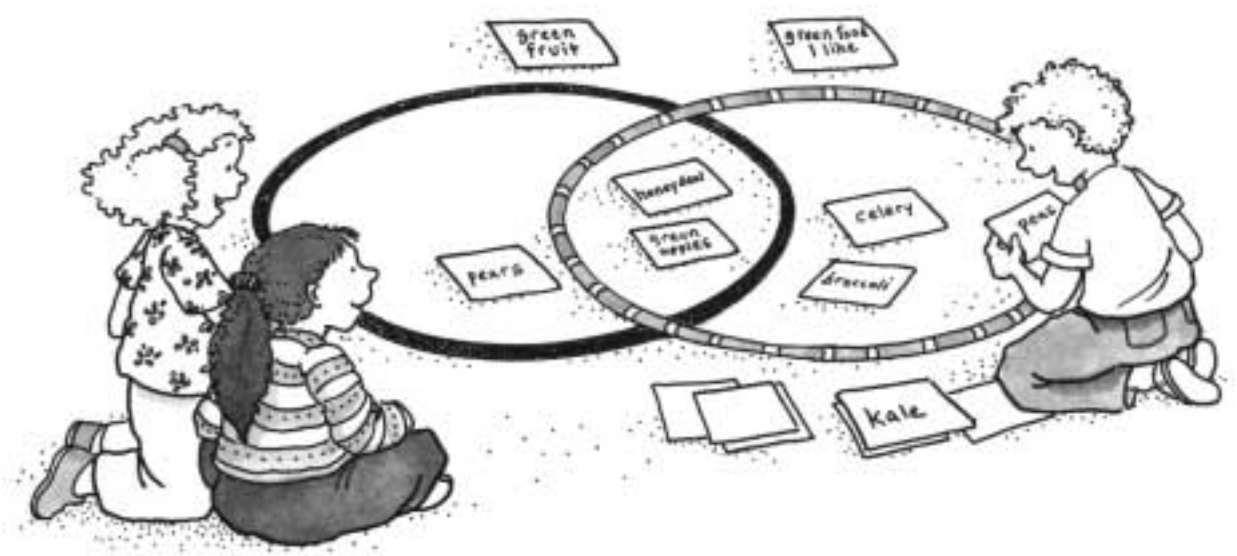
Tip

To strengthen classifying skills, let children cut out things that are green from magazines. Place them at a center with yarn for making a Venn diagram. Let children visit the center to practice sorting the green things. Have them describe their sorting rules on chart paper so that classmates can give them a try, too.

Go Green! (Science and Language Arts)

Children may not have enjoyed a meal of green eggs and ham, but they're probably familiar with lots of other green foods. Brainstorm some, and then use the list to launch an activity that will challenge children's classifying skills and get them thinking about characteristics of foods they do—or don't—like.

- Invite students to name foods that are green—for example, beans, peas, broccoli, cabbage, celery, kale, green grapes, kiwi, and collards. Write the names for these foods on index cards (one per card).
- Let each child think of a way to classify green foods—for example, Green Foods I Like or Green Foods That Are Fruits—and write it on an index card.
- Make a large Venn diagram by overlapping two hula hoops (or forming overlapping circles with yarn). Place children's index cards facedown next to the Venn diagram and let a child randomly select two. Place one next to each circle.
- Let children take turns selecting an index card and deciding where it goes: in the overlapping section of the circles if it shares both characteristics, in one or the other labeled circles if it matches only one of the descriptions, and outside both circles if it does not belong in either. Continue with other green foods until they've all been classified. Let a child choose two new classification cards and repeat.



Who Eats Eggs? (Math)

Use this story as a springboard for an activity that lets children learn more about each other, and reinforces graphing and data analysis skills.

- Take a quick survey: "Who has eaten green eggs? Who would like to?" Take a count for each question and compare.
- Take a second survey: "What is your favorite way to eat eggs?" Have students make graph markers to show their response (scrambled, fried, and so on). Children who don't like eggs can write "I do not like them!"
- Set up a graph on a large sheet of paper, writing the different ways to prepare eggs across the bottom and including a space for "I do not like them!" at the end. Have children take turns placing their graph markers in the appropriate column.
- Discuss the data, asking questions such as "How many more children would rather have their eggs [name one way] than [name another way]? Do more children in our class like or dislike eggs?"
- As a follow-up, invite children to gather the same information from family members. Create a second graph and compare the data. How are the graphs similar? How are they different?

All About Eggs (Science, Language Arts, and Art)

Which animals lay eggs? Let children find out with an investigation that teaches the use of nonfiction text features.

- Brainstorm animals that lay eggs—for example, chickens, geese, turtles, fish, frogs, butterflies, and snakes.
- Let children work with partners to investigate one of the animals that lay eggs. Provide assorted materials for making models of the eggs. Clay is an obvious choice, but children might also paint small rocks, stuff small bags, or mold tissue paper and wrap with yarn or tape. Have children write captions to go with their models.
- To go further, have children create a page for a nonfiction book, drawing a picture of the egg, the baby animal that hatches, and the mother. Have them label each part, and write captions that include key facts.
- For a fun follow-up, write clues about eggs and the animals that lay them on slips of paper—for example, "I leave my eggs on a leaf. The leaf will be food for my babies when they hatch!" Glue pictures of corresponding animals to index cards. Place each clue in a plastic egg, and place eggs in a basket. Display animal cards nearby. Let children take an egg, "crack" it open, and match animals to eggs.

Book Link

After brainstorming with children animals that lay eggs, share a book to learn more, such as ***Chickens Aren't the Only Ones***, by Ruth Heller (Price, Stern, Sloan, 1993). Follow up by asking children if they know any other animals to add to their list.