

# Grade-by-Grade Learning: Preschool

What They Learn | How Kids Learn

## What Kids Learn in Preschool



### The Basics

In preschool, children learn about the world through play. Subject areas aren't separate in their minds or in the classroom. The objects preschoolers find on a nature walk, like feathers, rocks and leaves, might help them figure out math concepts like "big, bigger, and biggest" or motivate them to visit the book corner to find out more about birds. Teachers may introduce children to basic concepts such as shapes, letters, and colors, but preschool is about learning much more than what a circle looks like. It's where children first develop a relationship with learning.

### Language & Literacy

Children spend most of the preschool day working together with classmates. Each conversation, whether talking about the class pet or deciding which color block to put on top of their tower, helps children develop their thoughts and language. Preschool teachers read aloud simple stories like "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom" by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault and "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle to show children that text runs from left to right, expose them to new vocabulary, point out letter sounds and rhyming words, and help children talk about what they read.

Writing often appears as scribbles in the preschool classroom, but letters or shapes that resemble letters soon pop up as children try to write their own names in creative ways. Teachers model writing for preschoolers throughout the day. Many children will not be able to write words conventionally. However, every scribble shows that a child understands that the printed word carries messages, and that she is excited to be able to create these messages.

### Math

Preschoolers use numbers every day when they count milk cartons for lunch or figure out how many children are at a table. They work with geometric shapes such as triangles, rectangles, and squares in the block center, and through art projects. They measure at the water table when they compare the size of their hands and feet. Preschool teachers invite children to arrange items in a series or pattern when they make collages and other art projects. Teachers also use simple graphs to present concepts, for example, determining how many children wear mittens to school and how many wear gloves.

### Science

Preschoolers are scientists. They learn about the world by observing and experimenting. Natural things fascinate them, from rocks, to animals, to their baby brothers and sisters. They also notice the many ways that they can influence the natural world. Preschoolers may plant seeds, or watch what happens to an ice cube in a warm room. They'll test what sinks and what floats at the water

table, and which blowers make the biggest bubbles. They'll find non-fiction books about animals and nature in the classroom library.

### **Social Studies**

Preschool social studies is where children learn about their place in the world. Understanding how to get along with others can often take up the biggest part of a preschooler's day. Children learn how to resolve conflicts and practice skills like sharing, taking turns and cleaning up. They figure out how to express their feelings using words. The class may also explore its community and the people in it by taking short field trips around the neighborhood.

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## **How Kids Learn in Preschool**



### **Becoming Learners**

In preschool, children first learn "how to learn." They begin to form their attitudes toward school and to see themselves as learners. Strong preschool experiences will help a child think, "I am a good learner. I can find problems to solve. I can master a difficult task." These experiences show preschool children the power that learning holds.

### **Learning through Play**

If you want to know how your preschooler learns at school, just think about the way she learns at home. When your child helps you measure ingredients for her favorite cookie recipe, she's getting a math lesson. When he makes sand castles at the beach and then watches the wave wash them away, he's learning earth science — although he's probably not ready to understand the term "erosion."

In school, preschoolers learn through play in the same ways, with the guidance of their teachers. They experiment with the properties of matter at the sand and water tables. They learn phonics when they sing songs together. They master important physics concepts like balance and stability as they build blocks at the block center.

### **One Skill at a Time**

Most preschoolers are not developmentally ready to keep more than one concept in their heads at a time. Take counting, for example. At first, numbers that a child counts in a sing-song manner are just a sequence of words. Then all of a sudden the words become useful as the child learns to match them to an amount by counting fingers. The numbers have now been matched to a meaning.

### **Forming Pictures in their Heads**

"Preschoolers also learn about their world by forming visual pictures — or little movies in their heads," notes Diane Levin, Ph.D. "Each thought they're thinking is like a frame of the movie. They construct these visual movies in their minds as they play. One movie could be about how to make the blocks fit together, another about how to make the blocks into something else. More

movies might be about how to work with other kids to create what they want to do and how to solve the problems that can arise. These mental movies help them get familiar with a process and figure out a situation.”

Source: <http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/going-to-school/grade-by-grade/preschool/>

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