



Choosing **PLAY** Materials for Primary School Children (Ages 6–8)

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Children in this age range benefit from a number of the types of materials that support and nourish development in earlier years, as well as additional, more complex play and learning materials. Materials that facilitate social understanding and cooperative interaction continue to be important and can be expanded to include concepts in social studies. Children are increasingly peer oriented during these years and are better able to consciously cooperate, negotiate with each other, and stick to simple rules in games. They are also more apt to form groups that exclude others as they learn to use and create rules and strategies for social acceptance and successful interaction. Antibias materials and those that promote responsibility, respect for others, and cooperation may help to reduce these tendencies.

Materials that support creative expression in art, music, and movement also continue to be important. Many children develop an interest in formal lessons in one or more of the arts during this period, and some schools offer beginning group or individual instruction. Opportunities for creative self-expression can nourish awareness, sensitivity, and confidence. They can also provide another area for skill development and achievement for children in the early school years, who are now more interested in products and outcomes and more aware of their own relative performance.


An increasing variety of materials are useful and important for promoting the development of literacy, mathematical and spatial understanding, mechanical understanding, concepts related to nature and science, critical thinking, and understanding of the “scientific method.” Well-designed materials can also support the development of “process” skills, which help children learn how to learn. Process skills include multiple and hierarchical classification, measuring, graphing, sequencing, planning, monitoring and correcting performance, hypothesis generation and testing, and logical inference.

Providing children the opportunity to choose and carry out learning activities independently supports the development of persistence, effective self-direction, and intrinsic motivation. Providing a variety of materials for children’s independent learning activities (alone or with peers) is one dimension of effectively responding to individual differences in the classroom. When children have available a variety of materials at different levels of challenge and in a variety of interest areas, they can participate in a curriculum that meets their individual needs.

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PLAY Materials for Primary School Children (Ages 6–8)

| Social and Fantasy Play Materials | Exploration and Mastery Play Materials | Music, Art, and Movement Play Materials | Gross Motor Play Materials |
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| <p>Mirrors same as for adult use</p> <p>Dolls washable, rubber/vinyl baby dolls (with culturally relevant features and skin tones) (for younger children—age six) accessories (culturally relevant) for caretaking—feeding, diapering, and sleeping (for younger children—age six) smaller people figures for use with blocks or construction materials (for fantasy scenes and models)</p> <p>Role-play materials materials for creating and practicing real-life activities—play money with correct denominations, book- and letter-creating materials</p> <p>Puppets puppets that represent familiar and fantasy figures for acting out stories (children can also create their own) simple puppet theater—children can construct one (children can create props and scenery)</p> <p>Stuffed toys/play animals realistic rubber, wood, or vinyl animals to incorporate into scenes and models or that show characteristics of animals being studied (such as reptiles and dinosaurs)</p> <p>Play scenes small people/animal figures and supporting materials with which to construct fantasy scenes or models related to curriculum themes</p> <p>Transportation toys small, exact (metal) replicas preferred by children of this age range are not usually used in school settings, but more generic small models are useful construction or workbench materials for children to use to make models of forms of transportation</p> | <p>Construction materials a large number of varied materials for detailed construction and for creating models (can use metal parts and tiny nuts and bolts)</p> <p>Puzzles three-dimensional puzzles jigsaw puzzles (50 to 100 pieces)</p> <p>Pattern-making materials mosaic tiles, geometric puzzles materials for creating permanent designs (art and craft materials)</p> <p>Dressing, lacing, stringing materials bead-stringing, braiding, weaving, spool-knitting, and sewing materials now used in arts and crafts</p> <p>Specific skill-development materials printing materials, typewriters, materials for making books math manipulatives, fraction and geometric materials measuring materials—balance scales, rulers, graded cups for liquids, etc. science materials—prism, magnifying materials, stethoscope natural materials to examine and classify plants and animals to study and care for computer programs for language arts, number, and concept development and for problem-solving activities</p> <p>Games simple card and board games word games, reading and spelling games guessing games memory games (Concentration) number and counting games (dominoes, Parcheesi) beginning strategy games (checkers, Chinese checkers)</p> <p>Books books at a variety of difficulty levels for children to read storybooks for reading aloud poetry, rhymes, humorous books, adventure books, myths books made by children</p> | <p>Art and craft materials a large variety of crayons, markers, colored pencils, art chalks, and pastels (many colors) paintbrushes of various sizes a variety of paints, including watercolors a variety of art papers for drawing, tracing, painting regular scissors pastes and glues (nontoxic) collage materials clay that hardens tools (including pottery wheels) more complex printing equipment craft materials, such as simple looms, leather for sewing and braiding, papier-mâché, plaster of paris, small beads for jewelry making, etc. a workbench with more tools and wood for projects (with careful supervision)</p> <p>Musical instruments real instruments, such as recorders (sometimes used for group lessons in school settings) a wider range of instruments for children to explore (borrowed or brought in by parents or special guests)</p> <p>Audiovisual materials music for singing music for movement, including dancing (folk dancing by age eight) music, singing, rhymes, and stories for listening audiovisual materials that children can use independently</p> | <p>Balls and sports equipment youth- or standard-size balls and equipment for beginning team play (kickball, baseball, etc.) materials for target activities (to practice skills)</p> <p>Ride-on equipment (children may be very interested in riding bicycles, but this is no longer included as a school activity)</p> <p>Outdoor and gym equipment complex climbing structures, such as those appropriate for age five (including ropes, ladders, hanging bars, rings)</p>  <p><i>Note:</i> Although the four categories provide a useful classification, play materials can typically be used in more than one way and could be listed under more than one of the categories.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Excerpted from Martha B. Bronson, <i>The Right Stuff for Children Birth to 8: Selecting Play Materials to Support Development</i> (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1995), 110–11, 120–21.</p> |