

Creating A Print Rich Environment

July 1999
Frederick County Public Schools

Shari Ostrow Scher
Curriculum Specialist for Early Childhood Education

Creating A Print Rich Environment



July 1999
Frederick County Public Schools

Shari Ostrow Scher
Curriculum Specialist for Early Childhood Education

*Frederick County Public Schools
Frederick, Maryland*

August 26, 1999

Dear Friends,

In the past year or two, there has been great emphasis placed on adding literacy to the early childhood classroom. The attached document was written to offer answers to a number of questions and to provide suggestions for building classroom print. I am hoping that you will find a new strategy, receive clarification, or be motivated to send me ideas that I may share with your colleagues.

While reading this document, think about all aspects of the 'Print Rich Environment'. It is imperative that children be surrounded by print, and that they have multiple opportunities to interact with reading and writing to build their literacy skills.

I would like to offer a special 'thank you' to Jerry Strum, Liz O'Beirne, and Donna Quatman-Wilder for their helpful editing. I hope that all of you have a wonderful school year.

Sincerely,

Shari Ostrow Scher
Curriculum Specialist for Early Childhood Ed.
Frederick County Public Schools

Frederick, Maryland



A Print Rich Environment

What is a print rich environment?

This refers to a room that has a variety of print abundantly displayed. It includes:

- a variety of student and adult generated books,
- writing tools, labels, lists, poem and song charts,
- samples of adult and student writing,
- helping tools for the creation of student writing, signs, poems, student dictations and original stories.

It is an environment that encourages children to read and write by virtue of the rich literacy that surrounds the children.

Why is this important?

Recent research on the development of reading and writing skills in young children is unequivocal; the young child must begin to gain literacy skills during the very early years to be academically successful. One way to begin to accomplish this is for the child to be immersed in a print rich environment. This environment must include an array of opportunities to see and respond to language in a context that is motivating and important to the child. This is particularly invaluable for students who come from homes without rich print opportunities.

Does this refer to a separate literacy center, centers integrated with literacy, or the print on the classroom walls?

Literacy around the room refers to all of the above. It is assumed that the early childhood classroom will have walls filled with words that come from student interest, student need, and word chunks. Dictations, original stories, labeled photos, posters and pictures are abundant. The key to these signs of literacy is that they are generated by student creations and student need. As few commercial products as possible should comprise the literacy examples. Every center should have reading and writing tools that, once again, meet the authentic needs of young children. There must also be a place for a rich writing center that has tools and materials changed often enough to reflect student needs and interests. In addition, the room's library area should be a comfortable place that beckons children and encourages read alouds and book sharing.

What are some examples of print generally found in the room?

Most early childhood teachers are aware of the importance of a print rich

environment that allows many opportunities for students to interact with print. These include:

- samples of student dictation,
- student writing,
- teacher made rebus charts and labels.

Whenever possible, writing should be displayed at the child's eye level. Additional ideas include the following:

Can You Read This? - Everyday post a commercial picture or an item that represents a product familiar to the children. This may be a label from a commonly used soup, toothpaste or soda, or a picture cut from a magazine of a commonly known fast food restaurant or toy store in the child's neighborhood. Children may be encouraged to "read" the picture and draw a picture or write a sentence about it. This can be used as an independent activity as children enter the room or during transition.

This Is My Favorite- Children bring in pictures of their favorite print sign- a magazine picture of a fast food restaurant, a picture of a traffic sign, a cereal box top. Children get to tape or staple it to the *This Is My Favorite* bulletin board.

Message Board- Make a bulletin board available for children to leave messages for one another. Have lots of large size Post-it© notes and writing tools available near the bulletin board. Also, have students' names on cards near the board. Upon entry, during centers, and at dismissal children may go to the board and write a message for a friend. The friends should be encouraged to respond.

Who Am I?- Use student photos and encourage children to sort them and make labels of students' names underneath them. As children become more sophisticated, the photos may be of students' shoes, eyes, noses, arms, etc. For the beginner, the child may just match the name to the pictured body part. It can be made self-checking by having the students' name on the back of the photo. This makes a good game for arrival, dismissal or centers.

Who Are They? - Have children bring in photos of their family or of their child care provider. Take dictations about each picture. Place the photos in an album or on a bulletin board. Children may be encouraged to write stories about their pictures during arrival or dismissal.

Rain Gutter Holders- Using rain gutters on the floor, books can be placed around the room. This enables the child to see interesting titles at eye level; it is also a good way to use often unused floor space, such as the space beneath a wall-mounted chalk board.

Clothes Line Storytelling - In different areas of the room, clothes line can be draped. A pile of story picture sequencing cards with simple sentences can be placed in a basket next to the clothes line. Children can be encouraged to sequence the story- beginning, middle, end- then hang the cards on the line in appropriate sequence.

Magnetic Letter Fun - Purchase a large automotive oil tray from a local automotive store. In a basket, place multiple sets of magnetic letters and numbers. Children can be encouraged to work in pairs or individually to create words, simple sentences, copy words and sentences, make many words using a word chunk. The large tray encourages children to work in pairs or to be creative in the number of words or sentences they create.

What Is Environmental Print and What Are Some Examples Of It?

Environmental print is the print that we see all around us. It is the print found on commercial signs, labels and billboards. Young children can usually 'read' the print due to the pictures, colors or shapes that surround the written words. It is therefore an initial stage of literacy. It is important to note that the environmental print that children can read is determined by prior experiences. Therefore, children in a given class come to school with very different acquisition of environmental print.

While many teachers use environmental print in their classrooms, some unique ideas follow:

Puzzle Fun- Take a common cereal box or cookie carton. Cut out the front of the box. Make it into a puzzle by cutting it into a variety of shapes. Place the 'puzzle pieces' in a box of the same cereal or cookie. This activity can reinforce a student's understanding of environmental print or add new words to a child's reading vocabulary.

My Favorite Words- Have children work with their parents to collect favorite food boxes and labels. Have children bring them into school and 'read' their words to their friends. These can be collected in individual student folders.

I Can Read- Children can take their favorite environmental print words and make a book. Each page should have a different environmental print word. They can be encouraged to 'read' their books to their classmates and to swap them with one another during literature time. If preferred, each child can be given a page to create a class book. Using the caption "Marilyn can read....", the child's favorite example of environmental print can be pasted on a page.

ABC Book- Advanced students may work together to make an ABC book of environmental print. Cooperatively or individually they may bring in authentic items from home or use pictures from a magazine to find examples of environmental print for each letter of the alphabet.

Concentration- Using pairs of environmental print samples, create a concentration game. Prekindergarten children may start with three pairs of samples; kindergarten children may begin with five pairs.

Lotto- Using the environmental print samples, simple lotto games can be constructed.

What Is Functional Print And What Are Some Examples Of It?

Functional print is the print children see around the classroom. They use functional print to gain information about routines, procedures, and schedules. It includes the print on labels and charts. Because it is often presented before children can read actual words, it should be accompanied by pictures, color coding, and repetitive symbols. The purpose of functional print is to help children develop the knowledge that print is made up of symbols that help people communicate. The newest research on reading shows that it is imperative for young children to be immersed in functional print in order for them to gain an understanding of the reading process.

Examples of functional print include: Morning Message, Job Chart, Attendance, Calendar, Weather Chart, Daily Schedule, Center Chart. Additional ideas may include:

Library Time- Place books by categories in a variety of boxes. Children may check out a book box by writing their name on an index card and placing it in a pocket on a bulletin board. This allows them practice in using a library system.

Book Bag Fun- Have a sign up sheet for children to write down what they are reading, what they want to read next, and what their favorite book has been so far. The children can decorate a large sturdy bag, and write their name on the bag front. The books they have named are placed inside and may be hung on hooks during the day, or taken home at the end of the day. Children may enjoy reading their choices and swapping with peers during arrival, dismissal, and transition.

Book Choice- Place books, according to difficulty, on three different shelves. Label one *Hard*, the next *Harder*, and the third *Hardest*. This assists children in their book choices, while keying in on their inclination to do difficult, challenging work.

Name Writing- Offer children multiple opportunities to practice writing their names. Have them:

- 'sign in' each day,
- sign their names for centers,
- sign their names on a daily graph of 'Personal Favorites' (My favorite fruit is apples/oranges; My favorite nursery rhyme is Jack and Jill/Humpty Dumpy"),
- sign their names when they lose a tooth or first tie their own shoes.

Show and Tell Chart- At the end of centers have different children 'sign up' to share their completed work. This 'sign up' chart can be located in a Show and Tell Book or on a bulletin Board. As the teacher interacts with students, she can recommend that certain children sign up. Five children from the list may get a chance daily to share their accomplishments at Review time.

Star of the Week Chart- place a photo of a child on a bulletin board each week. The children will dictate or write what they like about the Star of the Week. Display dictations/student writing around the Star's picture. At the end of the week, the Star gets all of the dictations/stories to take home.

My Favorite Words- Using Baggie Books (books made of five zip-lock bags stapled together with the zip lock opening on the outside), each child can create a book of favorite words. These books can be changed as children's interests change.

Favorite Word Bulletin Board- Children may be encouraged to write a newly learned word or a favorite word on a particular bulletin board. They may also be encouraged to sign their names next to the word. As the paper becomes filled, it should be taken down and a new background piece of paper put up. At different times in the year, the papers of filled words should be placed on the floor so that children can see how many words they know.

Teacher Note - Using Post-its© or personal stationary, the teacher can drop each child a special note several times over the course of the year. These should be accompanied by pictures whenever possible.

As functional print is used, be certain that it is authentic and often reviewed. For example, having labels is meaningless unless the teacher often calls the students attention to the labels and plays games with them.

How May I Use Photos To Enhance My Print Environment?

Photographs are a wonderful tool to assist in the creation of a print rich environment. Young children are ego-centric; photos are the perfect vehicle for capitalizing on this developmental truth. While many teachers use photos to introduce children to one another or to post on cubbies in the beginning of the year, they can be used in a variety of other ways.

What Will I Be?- Have the children dress up using dramatic play clothes, label necklaces, and props brought from home to describe what they wish to be when they grow up. Take photos and have children write accompanying stories or offer dictations about their choices.

What Will I Do?- When children do not have an idea as to how to proceed in centers, offer them a 'basket' of photos of other children's work. These photos can be accompanied by dictated stories created by the children who are represented in the photos. The photos can be located in baskets or picture albums at each center or in a central location.

Who Are You?- The teacher will take pictures of students' feet, hands, back of heads, book bags, etc. Children match photos to the appropriate child's name.

Schedule Photos- Place pictures of children involved in the 'scheduled' activity at each part of the daily schedule. The words for the specific routine should also be present. This assists children as they move from the concrete to the pictorial to the abstract stages of development.

Same Material, Different Ideas- Offer children the same manipulative to use - beads and string, legos, lincoln logs. Take photos of how each child uses the material. Take dictations or have children write about what they did. This activity not only assists your print rich environment, it is a tool for assessing how individual children interact with a manipulative. (Compliments of Marilyn Dolbeare-Mathews who uses this during her home visits.)

Story Retelling- Read and reread a favorite book. Have children use simple props to dramatize the story. Take photos of the children as it is acted out. Use the photos to create a class book or bulletin board of the story with the children sequencing the photos and/or offering dictations about the story.

Attendance Sign-In- Take photos of each child on the first day of school. Place each child's photo on a chart that will be used for student sign-in each day.

Digital Camera Pictures- Use this technology to take frequent photos of the children in the room. Have children offer dictations or write simple stories describing the activity they are doing. These make important additions to newsletters, notes home, daily closure activities, center time review, etc.

What is A Word Wall And What Should It Look Like?

A 'Word Wall' is a list of words that have been discussed in a class by the children and displayed on the wall. It may consist of word chunks discussed, sight vocabulary stressed each day during Morning Message, or words of particular interest to a group of children. It must be started anew each year, revisited often, and be referred to by the teacher so that children may see its importance. The Word Wall will look different as children proceed through the primary grades. For this reason, the suggestions below are only for the kindergarten child or the advanced prekindergarten student.

In her book *Teaching Reading And Writing With Word Walls*, Janiel Wagstaff states that the following are the principles to follow when building and using Word Walls:

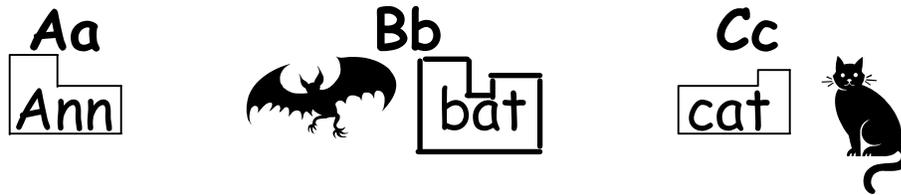
- Word Walls should be built over time with shared ownership between teachers and students.
- Words are harvested from rich language context.
- Word Walls should be kept as simple and uncluttered as possible.
- Words on the Walls should be visible to everyone.
- What to build and when to add is based on student needs. Walls must be kept developmentally appropriate.
- Use of Walls as helpful references must be modeled.
- The goal of creating and using Word Walls is ultimately automaticity of basic processes.

The most common type of Word Walls found in kindergarten are those that stress names of letters, forms of letters, and letter sound correspondences. These are called ABC Word Walls. The purpose of the ABC Word Wall is to develop phonemic awareness and automatic recognition of basic letter-sound correspondences. To get started, plan a weekly literacy activity. Examples include the reading of a poem or the study of a simple nursery rhyme. The words to use are chosen by the teacher based on students beginning sound knowledge. At first the words on the Word Wall should have single consonants. Picture clues can be added to a word to offer students extra assistance. The words may be chosen on Monday, the beginning sounds reviewed throughout the week, and the word itself added to the Word Wall on the last day of the week. The words are placed on the wall in alphabetical order.

In order for the Word Wall to be meaningful it must be used. It can be referred to:

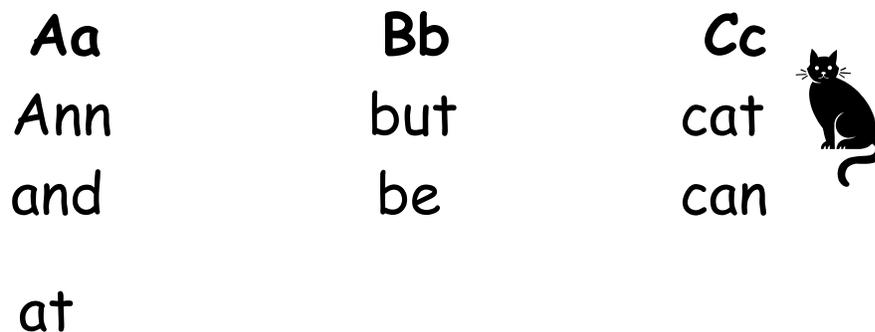
- during student writing as a tool for children,
- during guided reading lessons as a resource for practice with high frequency words,
- during centers as children write about their work,
- during the reading of the Morning Message as children use Word Wall words to help them figure out similar words with a repetitive pattern,
- during interactive writing so that children can use Word Wall words as they build more complex writing using chunks they know.

In fact, any time reading and writing is done in the room, the Word Wall should be a reference point. At the beginning of the school year, the Word Wall may look as follows:



It will have few words. The words are cut to reflect their shape.

At mid-year, the Word Wall may look as follows:



It will have many words, and may very well have every letter of the alphabet represented by at least one word.

By the end of the school year it may be used for an assessment tool. Students may be asked to write all of the letters or words they know from the ABC Word Wall without looking. They may also be encouraged to use these words to write other words with similar patterns. Mini versions of the class Word Wall may be given to each child to take home over the summer. These are easily made using manila folders.

There are other types of Word Walls that are appropriate for kindergarten students. Following the development of the ABC Word Wall, when children are more knowledgeable, a word chunking wall may be started. While this is more commonly found in first and second grades, it can be used in a simple form in kindergarten. This Word Wall emphasizes key words that contain common spelling patterns or chunks. The words are chosen based on their chunks, not for their beginning sounds. The goal for this type of Word Wall is to build upon student's ability to read and spell unknown words quickly and efficiently. It is common to add no more than two or three words to this Word Wall every week. This is important, for the purpose of the Word Wall is to use these chunks automatically to assist student reading and writing. Therefore, the goal may be to have just a few words that children know automatically. The words are placed on the wall in the same fashion as the ABC Word Wall - cut to shape.

A third type of Word Wall is the Words-We-Know-Wall. In kindergarten, this

wall would contain high-frequency words that lack predictable spelling patterns. They are often the words found in the *Morning Message*. The purpose of this type of Word Wall is to help students accurately spell and read high-frequency words. Once again, the words are placed on the wall in the same fashion as the ABC Word Wall - cut to shape.

For more information on all three types of Word Walls, refer to the work of Janiel Wagstaff or speak to the Reading Specialist in your school.

What Are Some Ideas For Making Childrens Books?

There are numerous types of child created books. Several options are described below.

Accordion Books-

Best used with small groups or individual children, these books are easy to make. If they are made of cardboard or tag board, they can stand, unsupported, on a shelf. Steps:

1. Begin with a long piece of paper.
2. Fold in half and then in quarters.
3. Tape sturdy paper to the front and the back to create a cover.

Options: If using butcher paper, fold in half lengthwise before beginning, this will make the book more durable. If the paper is long enough, fold many times in order to make as many pages as desired. If the pages are made out of tag board, cut them separately into the desired shapes. Tape the pieces together by putting tape on the front and the back of each page as you connect them.

Baggie Books-

Best used for individual students. They can be reused all year long. Steps:

1. Purchase either quart size or gallon size clear baggies.
2. Take 3 to 5 baggies and bind them together by stapling along the closed ends of the baggies. Place a piece of masking tape over the staples.
3. Children fill each page of the book with a favorite letter, objects of different shapes or colors, different numbers of objects, a favorite word, etc.

Flap Books-

These books serve as excellent motivators for children because of their 'surprise' element. Steps:

1. Make this book from sturdy construction paper.
2. Cut out shapes as you wish- squares and rectangles are the easiest to use with young children.
3. Have the children draw pictures and write their story on a page.
4. Tape a shape that is the same size to the top of the child's page. Have the child write or draw a message on this top page that encourages the reader to flip to the page beneath.

Options: Use papers of varying shapes. Have one child make the original page; have another listen to the first child's story and decide what the top page should say.

Pull-Apart Books-

These may be used to rekindle interest in a book that has already been created by the children. Steps:

1. Take a book that has been written by the children.
2. Separate the pages.
3. Place the pages, in sequence, on a bulletin board that children can easily see.
4. Have pointers available so that children may read the book as they 'Read and Write Around The Room'.

Options: Have children sequence the pictures for the bulletin board.

Shape Books-

These work for a variety of themes and purposes. They are also easy to use for introducing basic shapes.

They are excellent for young children. Steps:

1. Use sturdy construction paper.
2. Choose the shape you wish to use based on your area of study- mitten shapes, fish shapes, castle shapes, cloud shapes, etc.
3. Staple pages together.
4. Have children write or draw a story.

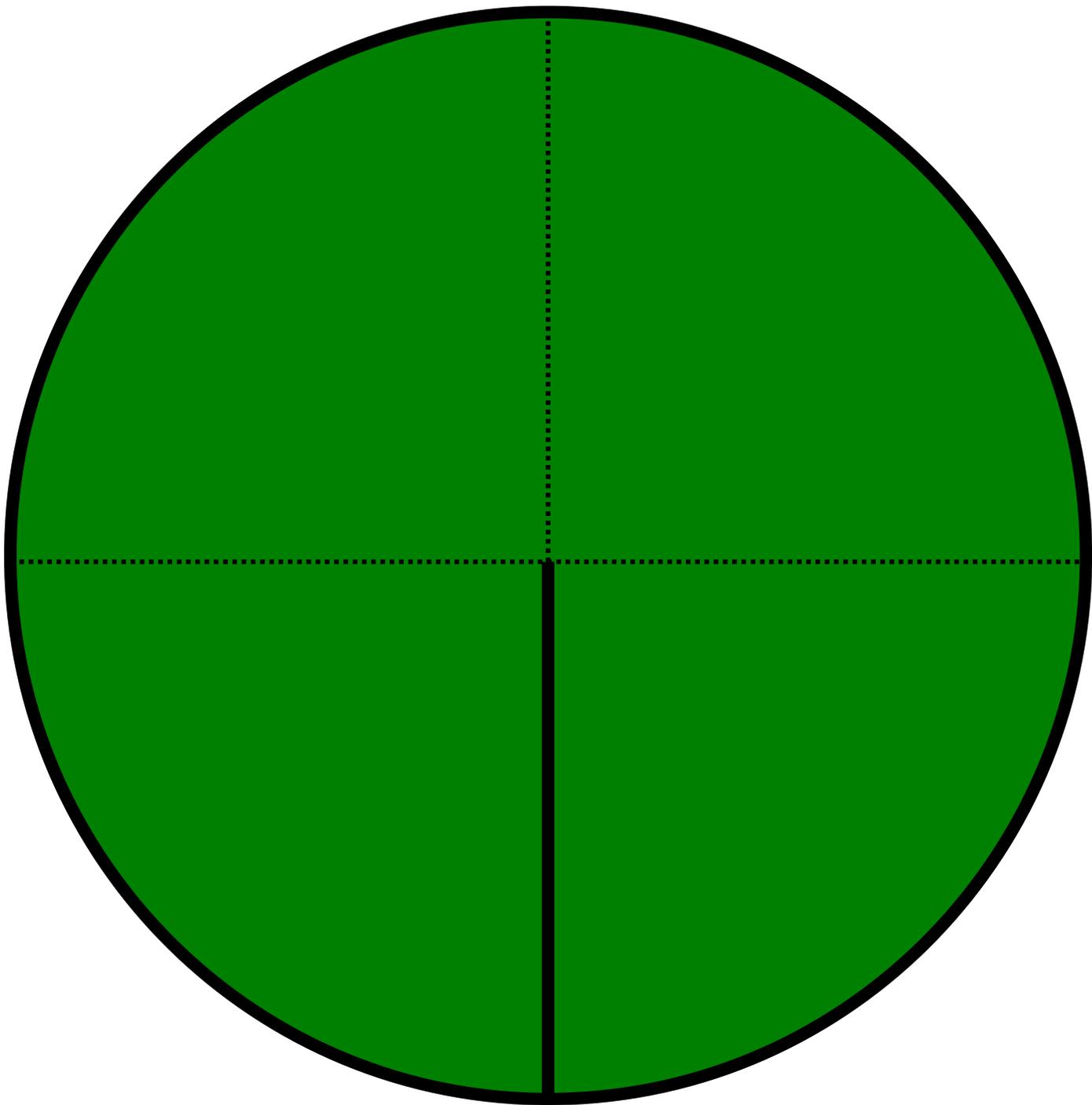
Options: Have individual shape books at the writing center. Make large shape books for small group writing or for the whole class.

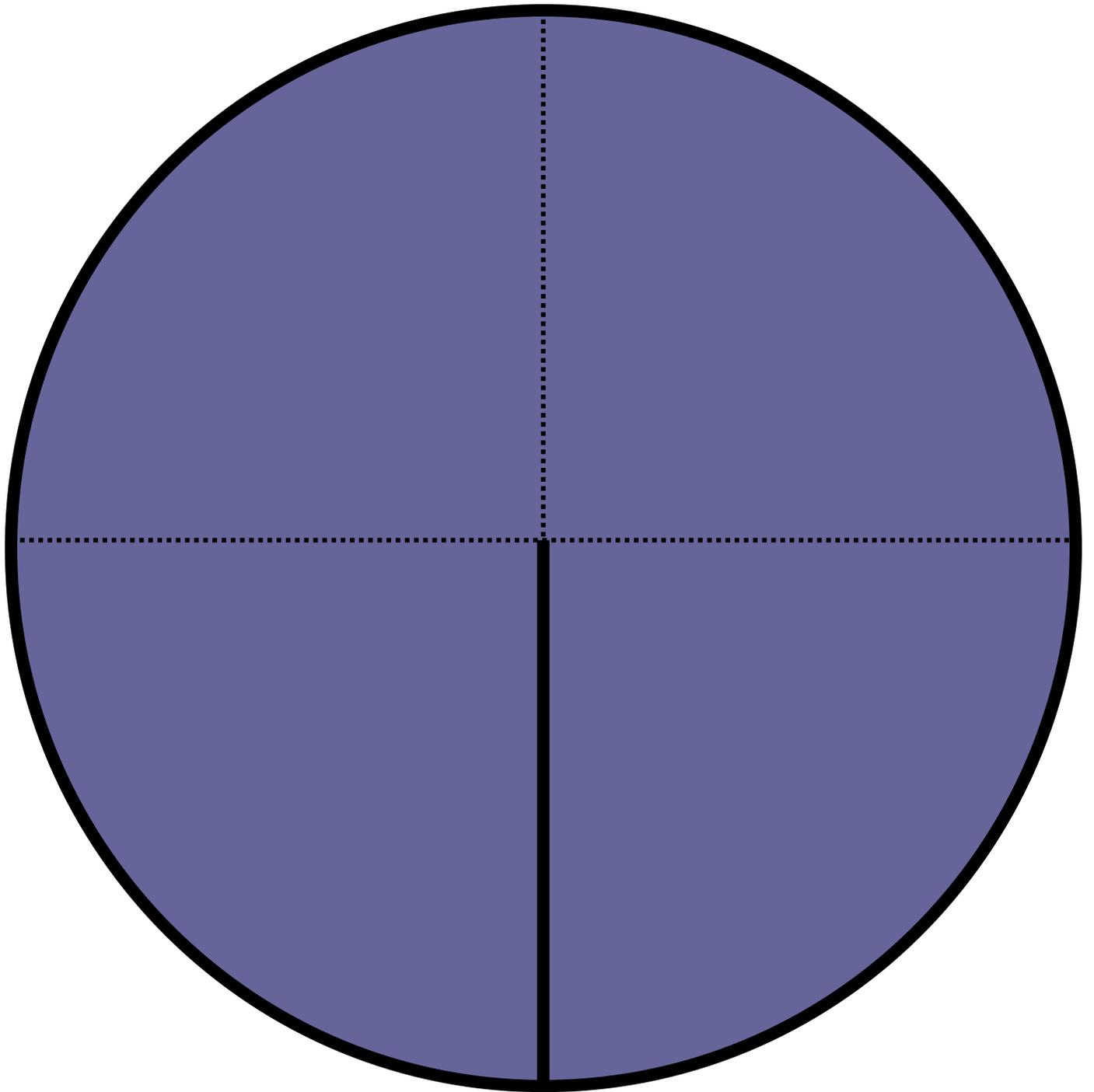
Circle Books - See attached.

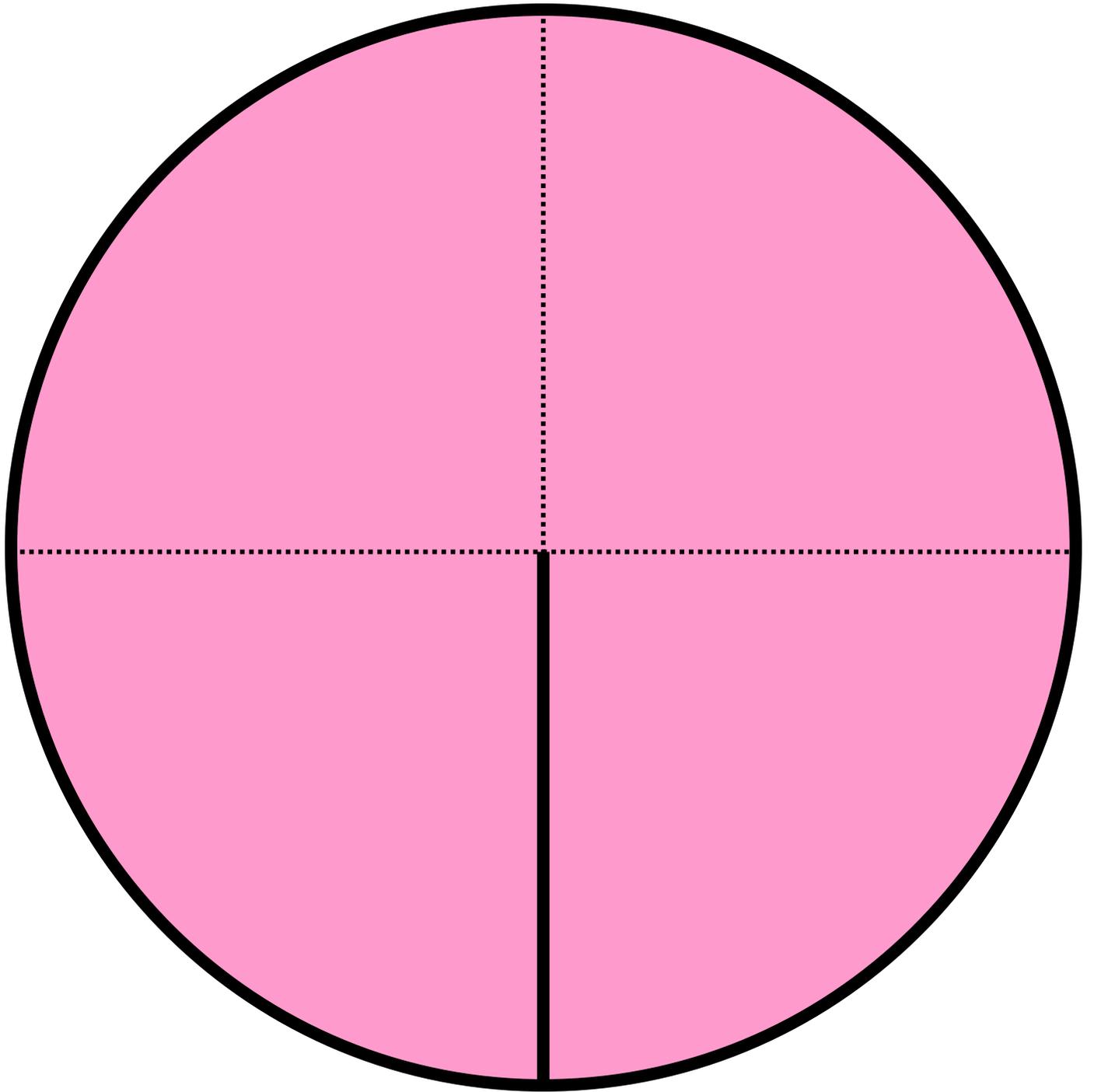
Directions for Circle Books

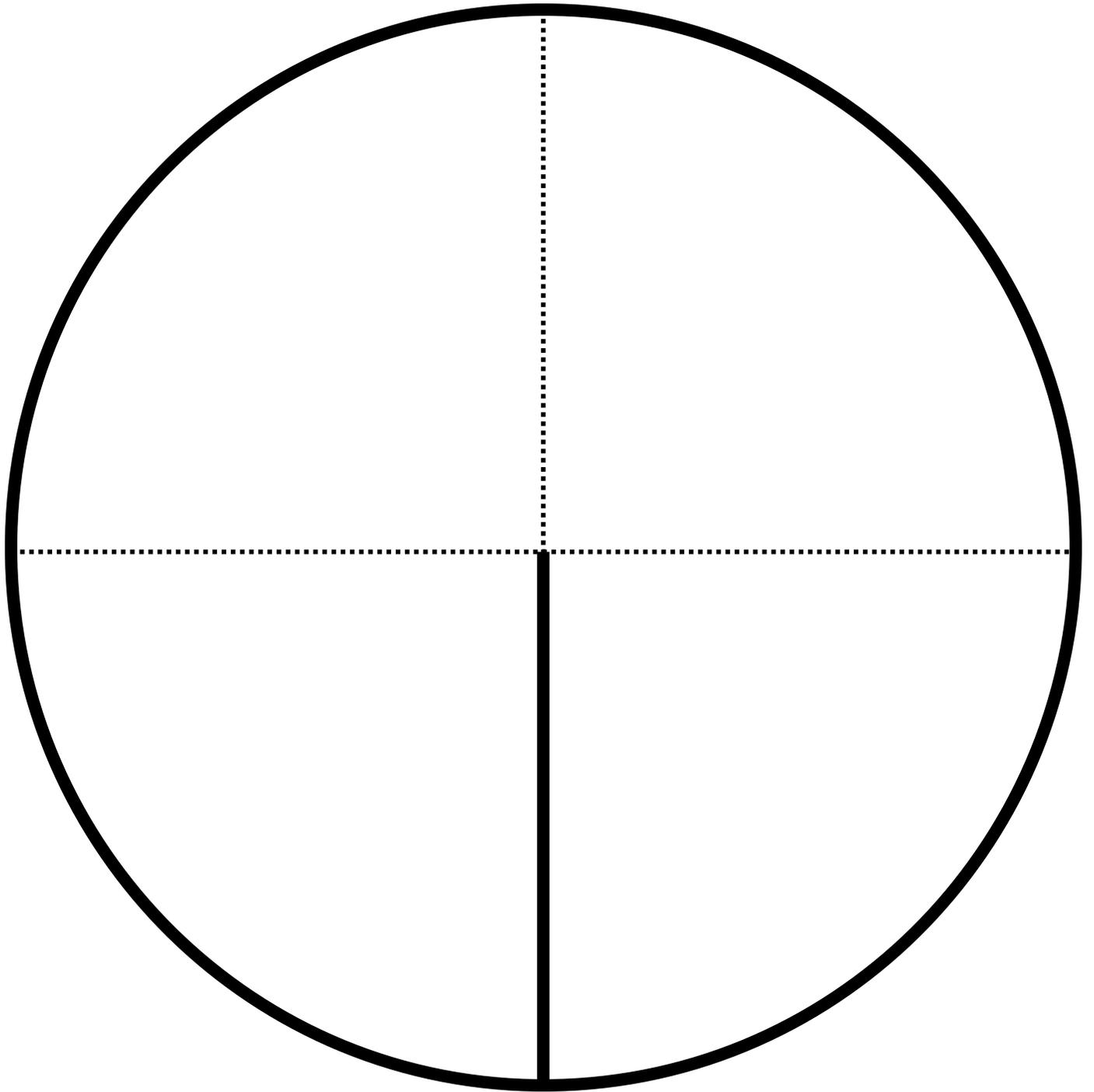
1. Cut out 3 circles from 3 different colors of paper.
2. Fold each circle in half and then in half again (dotted lines).
3. Make one cut in each circle from the outside edge to the center (solid line).
4. Place circles on top of each other with the cuts facing down.
5. Make one fold in the top circle from the bottom up.
6. Tape the top circle to the second circle at the cut.
(Left hand side of top to right hand side of second).
7. Continue to fold the top circle all the way around, until you begin to fold the second circle up.
8. At this point, tape the second circle to the third circle at the cut as in direction #6.
9. Continue to fold the circle around until the end.

r









Teacher Checklist
for a
Print Rich Environment

- ❑ Are there books and writing tools in every center in the room?
- ❑ Are children encouraged to use the books and writing tools in each center?
- ❑ Does the teacher model the use of the books and writing tools in the centers?
- ❑ Are there a variety of writing tools and materials available - crayons, pens, markers, pencils, paints, water and brushes, different types of paper?
- ❑ Are children encouraged to read and write throughout the day?
- ❑ Are there places in the room for children to display messages to classmates?
- ❑ Do the majority of bulletin boards display student art work, writings, dictations?
- ❑ Are there a variety of items that encourage students writings - puppets, flannel board, tape recorder, overhead, etc.?
- ❑ Are the displays of print current?
- ❑ Are there charts displayed at child's eye level- lists, recipes, songs, poems
- ❑ Are there comfortable places for children to read and write?
- ❑ Is the day filled with exciting activities that encourage children to write?
- ❑ Is there an abundance of 'authentic' reading materials that encourage and assist student writing- magazines, newspapers, cookbooks, yellow pages, menus, address books, pictionaries?
- ❑ Is there a Word Wall?

- Is the Word Wall in a place that is easily viewed by the children?
- Is there 'environmental print' in the classroom?
- Do children have opportunities to share 'environmental print' that is authentic for them?
- Are there labels in all parts of the room, including in every center?
- Is print included in most of the daily routines?
- Do pictorial/written directions, when appropriate, accompany the teacher's oral directions?
- Has the teacher explained the importance of environmental and functional print to parents?

Bibliography

Beeler, Terri. I Can Read! I Can Write! Cypress, California: Creative Teaching Press, Inc., 1993.

Cunningham, Patricia and Richard Allington. Classrooms that Work: They Can All Read And Write. New York: Harper Collins Press, Inc. 1994.

Evans, Joy and Jo Ellen Moore. How To Make Books With Children, Volume 1. California: Evan-Moor Corporation, 1985.

Goodman, Gretchen. I Can Learn! Peterborough, New Hampshire: Crystal Springs Books, 1995.

Holliman, Linda. The Complete Guide To Classroom Centers. Cypress, California: Creative Teaching Press, Inc., 1996.

Wagstaff, Janiel. Teaching Reading and Writing with Word Walls. New York: Scholastic, 1998.

Many of these resources are available in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Resource Library located in the Instructional Materials Center (IMC) at the Hayward Road Complex or accessing on-line on the FCPS Learning Village.