

## Preschool Themes Newsletter – February 2018

Hello Everyone,

Happy New year to you all! I hope this is a good year for you all. I have not been at school for the past two months which means I don't have any new art activities, so I thought I would discuss puzzles in this newsletter. I have also repeated some of the information I sent out to the new members in January. If you received a January newsletter please bear with me. Once I am back at school I will have lots of fun new art ideas to share with you all. Also a reminder that past newsletters can be accessed from the web site [www.preschoolthemes.co.za](http://www.preschoolthemes.co.za)

### **PRESCHOOL TEACHER**

The Hardest Job  
You'll Ever Love



Happy Valentine's Day for the 14<sup>th</sup> February, I hope you give and get lots of love.



### **Price increase**

I would like to give you advanced notification that the price of the preschool themes manuals will be increasing as of the 1<sup>st</sup> April.

I will have the new price in the next month. We have managed to keep the price of the same for several years, but the cost of paper and printing has increased so unfortunately we have to increase the cost. The theme books are still great value and make your preparation and planning a lot easier.



### **Puzzle and puzzle building**

Is there a correct way to build a puzzle? I googled this question and didn't really get one answer. It was more a case of which of the following building styles is the fastest way to build a puzzle!

Do you build a puzzle by building the frame first?

Or do you build a part of the puzzle or parts of the puzzle and then eventually put it all together?

Here are 5 strategies/ techniques for getting started assembling a jigsaw puzzle:

- Assembling the border and connecting other pieces to it
- Working your way out from one corner
- Trying to assemble faces or other recognizable parts of the picture
- Picking a random piece and working your way out from it
- Finding random pieces that fit together

Personally I always start by building the frame of the puzzle and I obviously reinforced this when I built puzzles with my own children as they all use that as their starting point to. I smile as I watch them reinforce that to their own children. Should you correct a child who prefers to build a puzzle by starting with a part of the puzzle and not the frame? I believe NOT. Each child has a different learning strategy and ultimately the puzzle will hopefully get built.

### Some advice for building puzzles with children

- Preferably there should be a picture for the child to be following and copying as this part of puzzle building develops figure ground perception (finding the place on the puzzle and then finding the same piece among many), whole and part (realising that a puzzle is a whole broken into pieces and needs to be put back in the correct place to create the same picture which is the essence of spelling)
- There should be sufficient space to build the puzzle, enough time to get it completed, and on a flat surface so the child has success.
- All the pieces should be there and they should not be broken or have the paper picture torn off.
- The child needs to turn all the puzzle pieces over before they begin to build.
- Some children need an adult to get them going and encourage them
- Some children want the one on one time with an adult while building



### When building a puzzle with a child

- Encourage the child
- Help them get organised by helping them turn all the pieces over
- Get them started with a piece or two of the puzzle
- Remind them to look for the puzzle piece on the picture or look at the picture and get them to look for that puzzle piece
- If the child appears stuck or unmotivated, help them to find the correct place for the puzzle piece but still allowing them to place the piece
- Some children need to be reminded to turn the puzzle piece to get it to fit
- Keep talking about the straight edges being the frame or outside pieces
- Some children prefer to build a puzzle alone without help from other children. Respect this request. It is very satisfying to complete the puzzle on their own
- If you can't stay with the child while they build then ask a good puzzle builder to help them
- Help the child to pack away the pieces when the puzzle is complete and check the floor for dropped pieces

### The level of difficulty is influenced mainly by factors such as:

- number of pieces:
- piece sizes
- the degree of detail of the picture and colour variation
- the child's experience with jigsaw puzzles
- the quality (cardboard thickness, susceptibility to bending and twisting of the pieces, precision of cutting)
- Other features that can help in arranging (image contours, piece shapes, etc.)

### Some frequently asked questions about puzzle building.

Top of this list is the question

- **Is it okay to set out puzzles that are missing pieces?**

*Yes and no is my short answer. If there are only one or two pieces missing I sometimes continue to use the puzzle if I am building with the children. It is very frustrating for children to build a puzzle missing pieces and I know they feel very satisfied when they have built a complete puzzle. But if this is the only puzzle you have, it is better to have a puzzle missing pieces rather than no puzzle but generally speaking not more than 3 max pieces missing.*

- **Is it okay to put out a puzzle that has no picture to follow?**

*Have you ever tried to build a puzzle without a picture to guide you? Its way more challenging without than with a picture! It's not totally unacceptable, but it does reduce the number of skills being learned from puzzle building and may be too frustrating for some children who may then give up more easily.*

*Some puzzles don't come with a picture to follow...only the frame and the outline of the puzzle pieces. I prefer not to use them but again if it's the only puzzle you have available it is better than no puzzle. If it's not too many pieces most children can manage to build it.*



**TIP:** Make a photo copy of the picture of the puzzle from the box as the boxes do get broken and lost. Laminate it if possible or at least paste it to cardboard for strength. If the box breaks keep the picture with the pieces in a zippy seal packet.

- **Is it okay to put out puzzles in an unsupervised setting?**

*I believe it is mostly a waste of time as all the pieces end up on the floor or puzzles are muddled up if you put out more than one puzzle. Obviously this ends up with no puzzle building happening. I always supervise puzzle building and create a time for the children to build puzzles. I limit the number and kind of puzzle that gets set out and I use a few work stations to prevent the pieces all getting muddled together. If your puzzle building area looks like this I would suggest you rethink puzzle building in your classroom.*



- **Are puzzles with several puzzles in one box a good idea?**

*While it is more economical to purchase a few puzzles in one box, it creates many problems for puzzle building in the classroom. If left to build unsupervised, the children are unable to sort the puzzle pieces into the correct puzzles and so end up doing a complete hit and miss approach to building the puzzles, and mostly they end up giving up and walking away from the puzzle area.*

*To eliminate some confusion I mark the back of each puzzle and show the children how to sort the pieces by the symbols or the colours. This can even be done at mat time so you are sure all the children understand the process. Some puzzles come with a different patterns already printed on the back or the back of the each puzzle is a different colour and this can be helpful but in general I have found these kinds of puzzles need a teacher present to help them get organised and to have success.*

**TIP:** It may be more practical to separate the puzzles into individual packets each with their own picture so more children can build without the possibility of muddling the pieces.



- **Are wooden puzzles better than cardboard ones?**

*That depends on the quality of the puzzle. Both can be poorly made and not last long. If you see the paper lifting on the edge of a cardboard or wooden puzzle piece glue it down promptly. Little fingers love to pull it off. Cardboard pieces get more damaged if a child 'eats' the puzzle piece. Poor quality wooden puzzles split and break and the knobs come off. Wooden puzzles are more suitable for the younger children. Always buy the best quality that you can afford. I would go so far as to say buy fewer but better quality if you have a limited budget.*

- **Should children be 'forced' to build puzzles?**

*Some children love building puzzles while others show no interest at all. Some children just understand that a puzzle is pieces that joined together make a whole. It is really hard trying to show a child how to build a puzzle if they are not interested so I would not rush them. Sometimes the issue is that the puzzle is too difficult. Offering them an easier puzzle may lead to them having success. This may be able to motivate them to continue building other puzzles.*

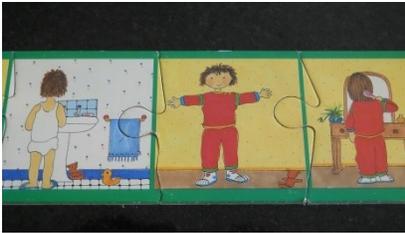
- **Is there a standard age to what size puzzle the child should be able to build?**

*No, children all develop at different rates and once they understand puzzle building they will increase the number of pieces they can manage. I often find the children can manage a bigger puzzle if you give them support or let two or three children build it together.*

**Puzzles as part of a theme**

Puzzles come in many shapes, sizes, styles and with a variety of pictures. Puzzles are a great way to reinforce skills through play and should be used as part of your theme whenever possible. Having said that, if the puzzle picture does not fit the theme please continue to use them. It is really important that children build puzzles in preschool as it teaches and allows practice for many perceptual skills needed for formal learning.

- Perseverance
- Eye hand coordination and fine motor skills
- Part and whole (spelling is building words from letters)
- Figure ground perception ( finding a piece between many others)
- Shape and form recognition

		
<p><b>Themed for my home</b></p>	<p><b>Colours</b></p>	<p><b>My home and occupations</b></p>
		
<p><b>Farm animals, Dairy</b></p>	<p><b>Clothes, myself and sequencing</b></p>	<p><b>Occupations, community workers</b></p>
		
<p><b>Alphabet sequencing</b></p>	<p><b>Numbers</b></p>	<p><b>Associations – adult and baby</b></p>

**Useful link for child development**

Here is a useful link to a very good article on Early Childhood Development: Curriculum Guidelines Grade 000 To Grade 3

The main purpose of this document is to provide a national reference to assist in facilitating consistency in terms of expectations and curriculum covered in Grade 000 to Grade 3. It is intended as a guide for ISASA schools but can be used by any educational institution. These curriculum guidelines

have been drawn up using extensive research into best practice both locally and internationally. However, they do not provide an exhaustive list of everything that a child should know or be able to do by the end of the Foundation Phase of learning but is a very good guide line.

<http://www.isasa.org/download/ecd-curriculum-guidelines-2015/?wpdmdl=3685>

### Preschool themes teaching sequence

I am often asked if there is a specific order that the preschool themes should be used. The preschool themes manuals are designed such that you select the themes relevant to your children and your school. While there is no specific order I like to start the year off with me and my body, my family and my home. This means you start off with what the children know and move outwards to the lesser known and wider environment. Some teachers like to include the 5 senses directly after me and my body which is fine too. I like to balance the themes over the terms so I would place the "animal" themes over the terms e.g. pets, zoo animals, wild animals, farm animals, water animals, reptiles and dinosaurs will be spread over the terms. I like to place the seasons in each term when the seasons can be experienced and any holidays or celebrations too. Some schools prefer to use a broader theme such as "the wider community" and then use any themes that fit into the heading. Others prefer to keep all the animals in one term but I personally find that becomes tedious and boring for the children and the teacher.



If the school has a limited budget then each group can be doing a different theme so the books can be shared between the teachers.

The themes in the preschool manuals start on a Monday but there is no reason why you can't start a new theme on a Wednesday as an example. For some schools this may be more suitable as it takes some of the Fridays and the weekend.

The themes are designed for one week of lessons, but they can be extended to two weeks if necessary.

The themes are intended as a guideline and work well when the teacher adds some of her own input and ideas.

I have created Pinterest boards for all the different themes to give you more ideas. You don't have to join Pinterest to access them, but it would certainly save you time if you did make your own boards to refer to.

<https://www.pinterest.nz/kstedall/>

### Art activities



These two pictures are white chalk drawings done on black paper



If you don't have black paper use coloured chalk on white paper. Wet chalk draws easier on white paper



My face koki pen drawing on a precut or predrawn circle. This face was pasted to a paper packet to make a puppet



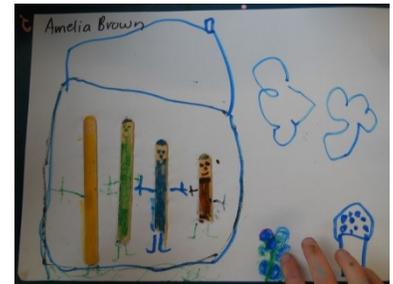
Drawing myself with crayons or koki pens, cut out and use for story telling or telling the group about themselves



Paper chain people with crayon details



Paper plate puppet face using collage and cut and paste



Sad and happy faces using a cardboard circle and crayons. These can be used at mat time to tell everyone what makes them happy or sad

Wooden sucker sticks cut to different sizes and coloured to represent their family. Encourage them to add their pets

Extending the activity to include drawing their home



Drawing faces using sawdust shavings for the hair

Painting my face on a paper plate

Collage my home using coloured paper shapes



Play dough faces. Sad and happy faces

Some children may need a circle to get started or offer them a paper plate to create the face on

Play dough birthday cakes

### Valentine's Day Activities

I have added an attachment with a few extra ideas for you to add to your planning around Valentine's Day and Colour Red. They are not my own ideas but come from my Pinterest boards

<https://www.pinterest.nz/kstedall/valentines-school/>  
<https://www.pinterest.nz/kstedall/colour-red/>

Happy teaching  
 Regards Karin

