

Primary Concepts®

Realia

Making Language Real



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Catalog No. 7014

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ISBN 978-1-60184-185-8

Dear Teacher,

Primary Concepts has been collecting miniature objects for use in the classroom since 1984. At that time, its founders, Ruth Ingram and Ilsa Perse, mailed their first catalog of treasures for the classroom under the name Concepts to Go. Over the years, the Primary Concepts warehouse has grown to house over 5,000 objects. Teachers have learned to depend on Primary Concepts to provide the most appealing, realistic miniatures for language development, phonics concepts, and number work in both Spanish and English.

Keeping supplies of these small miniatures is no easy task, requiring the efforts of a full staff of specialists. We feel it is worth the effort, however, to provide teachers with these highly motivating, hands-on learning tools. When the company was in its first year of business, a teacher who saw our early math activity, Count-a-Pig, said, "These pigs make children want to count!" Just as the pigs motivate children to count, the thousands of other adorable objects (realia) make children want to talk, read, and spell.



Teachers use realia for a variety of oral language and vocabulary development activities: sorting, acting out stories and songs, and so on. With this guidebook, we have compiled our favorite language lessons for use with miniatures.

If you are new to the wonderful world of realia, this guidebook will offer our best tips for keeping your objects organized and ready for use in your lessons. Once you see how rich your daily language lessons become when you incorporate miniatures, you will wonder how you lived without them!

Sincerely,

Your Friends at Primary Concepts

Overview

Many children in today's classrooms struggle with the English language. Some come from homes where a foreign language is spoken; others simply have not developed a large enough academic vocabulary to thrive in the classroom. In either case, many children are at risk because of their limited English vocabularies.

Realia—miniature objects that resemble their real-world counterparts—provide an excellent tool to help these children develop essential English vocabulary. Realia enhance meaning and make vocabulary more concrete and, therefore, more comprehensible.



Collecting Realia

You may wish to purchase a collection of miniatures for language development from Primary Concepts or begin collecting your own. Good places to look are party stores, toy stores, craft supply stores, and fabric stores. Supplement the bought items with objects you can find around the house, such as a rock or a stone, a piece of wood, a nail, a screw, a paper clip, a button, a snap, and so on. The best objects are realistic and three-dimensional, and they need to be safe for classroom use (e.g., no sharp edges). Try to collect a variety of objects from these categories:

animals

dolls

doll clothing and accessories

doll house furniture

foods

kitchen play sets

sports equipment

tools

toys

vehicles



For a few activities, you will want to have a set of objects—such as frogs, cats, dogs, horses, snakes, or fish—in which each member of the set is slightly different. A set of fish, for example, could have different colors, shapes, sizes, textures, or patterns. These sets are good for language lessons in which children describe the differences among the individuals in the set.

Collecting realia can be a continuous pursuit. Once you have a basic collection, you may want to keep looking for more obscure items that would be useful in your teaching.



Getting Organized

Once you've gathered a collection of realia, your next step is to keep the miniatures organized so you can quickly find just the object you need. We find it best to keep the objects together in a Vocabulary Development Center, typically a storage compartment with drawers labeled by category. You can buy a storage compartment at a hardware store or purchase one from Primary Concepts. Put the objects in the organizer and label the drawers by category.



Using Realia

One of the main ways to use your Vocabulary Development Center is to prepare language learners for regular lessons in which their language deficits may pose a problem. For example, if you are reading a book that involves sea creatures or you are working on a science unit involving sea life, have the children who need extra language support identify the related sea creatures from your Vocabulary Development Center before you begin your lesson. Some teachers simply pass around the realia as the lesson is being taught. Using realia to preview or to review a lesson's vocabulary puts everyone on an equal footing and prepares all children for success.

In addition to this ongoing use of the Vocabulary Development Center, you can also use realia with small groups of children to build specific language skills. Such activities invite children to build their oral language by listening and speaking. Activities in this guidebook are focused on using language to

compare, to describe, to differentiate, and to categorize. Children especially enjoy the storytelling activities.

As a general rule, when the children say a word or phrase incorrectly, simply repeat what they said using the correct word or phrase without comment. You might also want to expand on their verbalizations, transforming a word into a sentence or adding words to clarify meaning. For example, if a child says “seal,” you might say, “I see a seal.”

Prior Knowledge

Before you start working with a category of objects, check on the children’s existing language skills so that you can build from those.

Set out all of the sea creatures, for example, and have the children take turns pointing to an object and telling you one thing about it. Some children may be able to tell you the name of the object (e.g., “seal”); others may be able to impart some information about the object (e.g., “It swims.”). Some children may be able to tell you the name of the object in their native language but not in English; others may not know the word in any language. You may wish to tape-record the session. Later, you can use the tape as a record of a child’s progress.

Use the knowledge you gain from this activity to gear your language instruction to the needs of your class. It is best to work with groups of children whose language skills are at about the same level. The groups should be small (about 4–6 children) so that everyone will get plenty of talking time.

Assessing Progress

Since you will be working with the children in small groups, you will have a good understanding of their individual progress. Make sure that every child participates. Get into a routine of having each child repeat a word, a phrase, or a sentence so that everyone gets practice, even those who are most quiet. Keep a running record of observations, especially individual needs that are best addressed separately, such as articulation problems or attention issues that may be getting in the way of progress.

Periodically, assess children’s progress by setting out the same group of objects you used to assess their prior knowledge and ask them again to tell you about the objects. Listen together to the audiotape of the child’s first verbalizations. It will undoubtedly be clear to you as well as to the child how much progress has been made towards fluency with the language.



Additional Materials

Besides the objects, you will find the following materials useful in teaching the activities.

Sorting Mats and Label Cards

You can purchase sorting mats from Primary Concepts or make ones using the blackline masters on pages 49–52. You can make label cards by copying page 53 on cardstock, laminating the sheet, and then cutting out the cards. Children can use the label cards on the sorting mats.



Felt Workmats

A workmat can be useful in keeping children focused on the activity task. Sheets of colorful felt work especially well.

Baskets or Trays Baskets or trays make convenient places to put the objects that the children will be sorting and using for storytelling.

Story Mats Story mats provide an environment on which children can use miniatures to act out stories. The mats can be made by cutting out pieces of felt using the templates on pages 55–62. A good size for individual story mats is about 9" by 12". If you are artistic, you may wish to design your own environments. On the following page, you will find examples of the different kinds of story mats you may wish to use.



Story Mat Scenes

At the Pond (page 55)



Realia:
forest animals (e.g.,
frog, rabbit, duck,
fox, owl, bird, skunk,
bear, deer), nest,
boat, picnic basket,
blanket

Picnic in the Park (page 59)



Realia:
skateboard, kite,
camera, food (e.g.,
apple, grapes, pizza,
cake), ball, family
(e.g., mother, father,
sister, brother)

Under the Sea (page 56)



Realia:
sea creatures (e.g.,
shark, octopus,
starfish, crab, turtle,
lobster), sunken
ship, treasure chest

Barnyard (page 60)



Realia:
farm animals (e.g.,
cow, horse, sheep,
pig, hen, goat, goose,
rooster, turkey,
donkey, cat, dog),
wagon

In the Jungle (page 57)



Realia:
rainforest animals
(e.g., monkey,
parrot, tiger,
crocodile, butterfly),
log

Around Town (page 61)



Realia:
cars, airplane,
helicopter, bus,
motorcycle, bicycle,
truck, signs

Bug Life (page 58)



Realia:
ladybug, spider,
butterfly, bee, fly,
ant, worm, snail

African Adventure (page 62)



Realia:
lion, elephant, zebra,
hippo, jeep, rocks

All in a Row

Who is first in line? Who is last?

SET UP Choose a set of animals and line them up in a row, all pointing one direction. You might use an object for the animals to be headed towards, such as a boat.

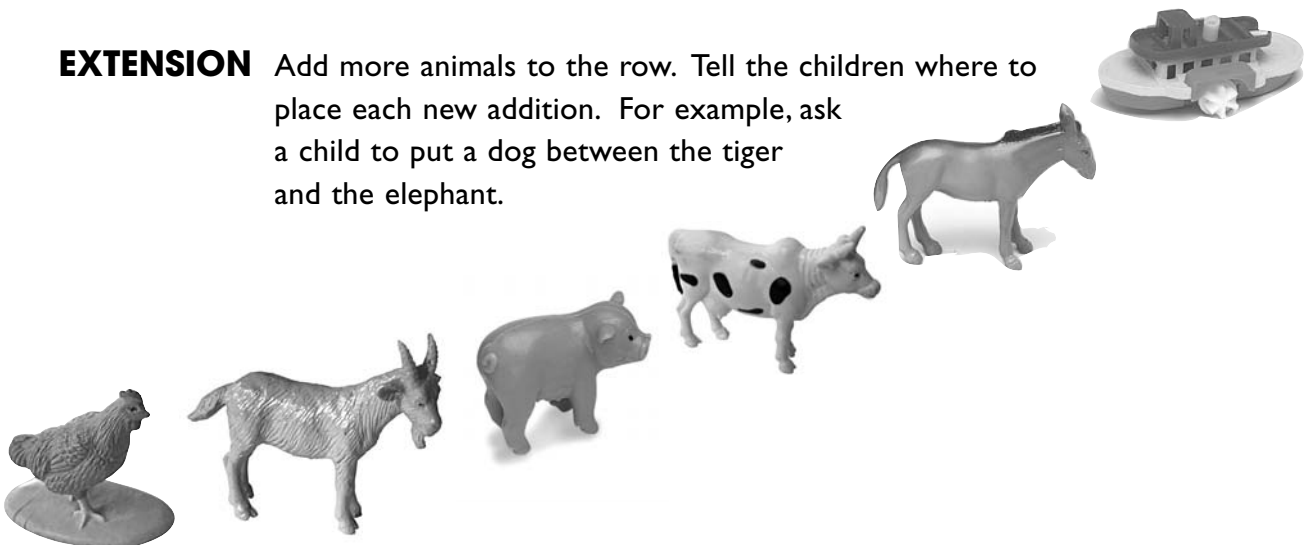
ACTIVITY Tell the children that you are going to describe where an animal is in line and they are to tell you which one it is. Here are some examples:

- It is *first* in line.
- It is *last* in line.
- It is the *second* (*third, fourth, fifth*) in line.
- It is *between* the horse and the pig.
- It is next *after* the cow.
- It comes just *before* the goat.
- It is *closest* to the boat.
- It is *farthest* from the boat.

Set up a different row of objects on a different day, and invite the children to take turns giving clues. Use position words like the following:

first next last before after
closest farthest second third fourth fifth

EXTENSION Add more animals to the row. Tell the children where to place each new addition. For example, ask a child to put a dog between the tiger and the elephant.



What Do You Do?

Children use lots of verbs in this activity.

SET UP Set out the objects listed below.

ACTIVITY Ask the children to pick an item and tell what they might do with it. For example, a child who picks a shovel might say, "You dig with a shovel." Make sure the children use complete sentences and that they use the proper English preposition following the verb, if necessary. Typical responses are listed below, although many others are just as correct.



Object	Verb
car	drive
horse	ride on
shovel	dig with
tree	climb
bed	sleep in
book	read
straw	drink with
camera	take pictures with
television	watch
kite	fly
knife	cut with
radio	listen to
whistle	blow
crayon	color with

Object	Verb
pencil	write with
ring	wear
couch	sit on
football	catch or throw
broom	sweep with
lamp	turn on
banana	peel, eat
drum	beat
guitar	play
phone	talk on
flag	wave
pan	fry in
cake	bake



EXTENSION Have the children pick a secret item and pantomime what they would do with it. For a whistle, for example, a child would pretend to blow a whistle. The other children find the item the child has picked and tell what the child is doing. "Megan is blowing a whistle."