



# Support for Learning Centers

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GRADES K-3





# Learning Centers

Use classroom learning centers to facilitate **independent and small-group learning**.

## What Are Learning Centers?

Learning centers are at once a **useful classroom management strategy** and an **important instructional approach** in the *JillE Literacy* classroom. In learning centers, students work on their own or in small groups on purposeful learning activities. Learning centers provide students with many opportunities for independent learning and practice. At the same time, they provide teachers with the time and opportunity to meet with reading groups, listen to individual students read, or gather data, knowing that the other students are engaged in **meaningful independent learning**.

## Establishing Learning Centers

The purpose of learning centers is to provide:

- Extension
- Reinforcement
- Enrichment
- Independence
- Responsibility

For learning centers to be established well, students need to be very clear of their **expectations, routines, and boundaries**. Take time during the first few weeks of school to introduce the learning centers to the class and to practice routines. Introduce one or two learning centers at a time and model what is expected at each center, including the proper use of equipment and cleanup of materials. Circulate to monitor students and help them learn to work independently.

Some suggested learning centers and activities for these centers are given on the following pages. The physical environment will influence the size and number of learning centers that can be established. If space is limited, many of the ideas can be housed in boxes called “Mobile Motivators” for use at student desks, group tables, or on the floor.



## Managing Learning Centers

A visible reminder of where students are supposed to be during learning center time is a helpful management tool for teachers and students alike. A variety of possibilities exist, but the example below is one of the simplest.

Create a **learning center task board** with pockets representing the different learning centers. If a center can accommodate four students at a time, create four pockets for that center. Use color-coding, pictures, or icons for each center to help students at early reading stages, and create matching signs for the center areas in the classroom.

Write each student's name on a card. Ask students to draw a picture of themselves on the card, or add a photo, if desired. Assign each student to an individual learning center by placing his or her name card in one of the pockets. Rotate the names to a new center each day. It is suggested that students stay at one center for the duration of the reading block (after independent reading) and move as individuals, not in a group. Students can also have a **learning center scrapbook** where they record which centers they visit each day and can paste (if appropriate) activities they may have done at the center.

Once learning center routines are firmly established, you may wish to introduce a free choice day or to allow students to move their own name cards. Be prepared to set limits and to monitor students' choices, especially at first. For example, you may wish to limit visits to some centers to once or twice per week.

**WHERE ARE YOU GOING TODAY?**

Library Ana	Library	Library	Library
Shared Books	Shared Books	Poetry	Poetry
Writing	Writing	Technology	Technology
Speaking and Listening	Speaking and Listening	Lin Science	Science
Words and Letters	Jack Words and Letters	Words and Letters	Words and Letters
Handwriting	Handwriting	Design	Trey Design



# Suggested Learning Centers

For teachers to implement effective small-group reading instruction, the other students in the class need to be engaged in **meaningful and self-directed learning activities**.

The suggested learning centers on the following pages provide valuable opportunities for students to practice and apply the skills they are learning and give teachers the necessary time to meet with small groups. Select learning center activities that are appropriate to the age and stage of your students and that students can manage without teacher assistance.

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## Library Center

**Materials:** a variety of trade books, writing and drawing supplies

Create an attractive display of trade books that represent a variety of genres, topics, and reading levels. To encourage students to investigate, display most of the books with the cover facing out. A bookstore-style display can be created using covered boxes for different levels of shelving or small boxes for browsing material. Rotate the books frequently. Provide paper, pencils, and colored pens for students to:

- Write or draw something about their favorite book
- Create an advertisement that “sells the book” to other students
- Draw a character from the book and add words that describe the character
- Make a flow chart, either written or visually, showing the events in the story, highlighting the problem and the solution
- Design a book cover for a book
- Create a poster for a movie version of the book

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## Shared Books Center

**Materials:** familiar Shared Books, pointers, large blank speech bubbles, question word cards (*how, why, when, where, who, what*), writing and drawing supplies

After the Shared Books have been used for shared reading, students can:

- Reread the Shared Books
- Read alternate parts in pairs
- Draw a character and write something the character said on a blank speech bubble
- Use the question cards to ask a partner questions or interview a character
- Make up a different ending
- Rewrite the story, changing the problem and solution



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## Poetry Center

**Materials:** Poetry Cards, pointers, children’s poetry books, writing and drawing supplies

After the poems have been read in class, house the cards in a large box in the poetry center. Collect and display a variety of children’s poetry books, along with photographs or pictures that provide ideas for writing their own poems. Invite students to:

- Record words or phrases from their favorite poems on a “Language We Love” chart
- Record pairs or sets of rhyming words on a “Rhyme Time” poster
- Illustrate their favorite poems
- Write and illustrate their own poems

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## Design Center

**Materials:** colored and plain paper, yarn, stapler, paper clips, boxes, cardboard, glue, cardboard tubes, scissors, tape, buttons, fabric, cotton balls, pencils, markers

Collect a variety of materials and place them in labeled containers. Create cards with ideas for things to create and simple instructions appropriate to students’ reading stage. Display the cards in the design center and change them frequently to spark students’ imagination and creativity. In this center, students can:

- Follow instructions for how to make, create, or design something
- Create something themselves; then write the instructions

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## Technology Center

**Materials:** computers, tablets, and/or interactive whiteboard, printer, Internet browser, learning software, word processing and presentation software

Provide students with a list of the websites and software programs that are allowed during center time, and ensure that controls are enabled for safe Internet use. Encourage students to use the available digital tools to:

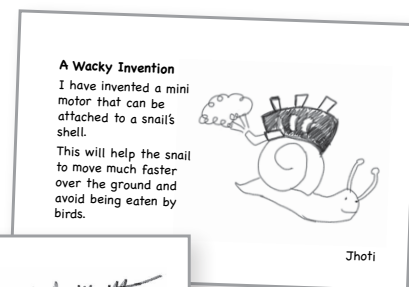
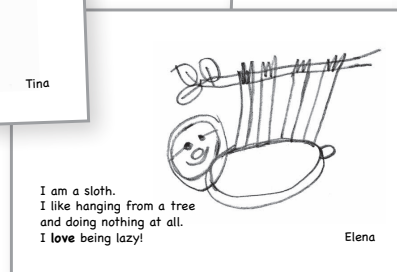
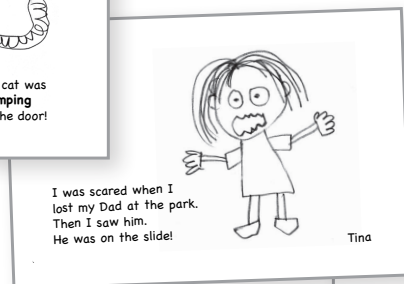
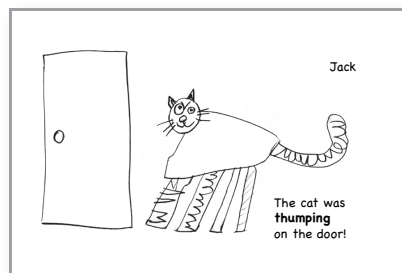
- Research topics
- Practice keyboarding
- Use software designed for individualized learning
- Publish their writing
- Create audiovisual and slide presentations

## Writing Center

**Materials:** paper of varying sizes, shapes, and colors, prepared blank booklets, cards, envelopes, pens, pencils, erasers, stapler, photographs, illustrations, magazine clippings, an “observation box” with small items such as a small shell, leaf, tool, or anything that could spark an idea for students to write and draw about

Create cards or signs with writing ideas appropriate to students’ age and stage of writing development. Display them in the writing center and change them frequently to encourage students to write in different forms and for different purposes. Writing suggestions could include:

- Write a made-up story.
- Write about a picture or object.
- Write about a real person or animal.
- Write about something you know how to do.
- Write a list of things you will need for a school play, trip, or celebration.
- Write a list of things you need to do today or this week.
- Choose a character from a story and write a new story about him or her.
- Write a story about something you saw with your own eyes.
- Write a story about something that could never really happen in real life.
- Write a diary or journal entry for yourself, another person, or a fictional character.
- Write a description, and have someone else guess the object or person.
- Write a description of a place using all five senses.
- Write a letter to your favorite author or illustrator.
- Write a persuasive letter to a teacher, the principal, or a family member.
- Write a thank-you card to someone who did something nice for you.
- Write directions for how to do or make something.
- Write a short report on something you have learned a lot about.
- Write an advertisement for a new store, restaurant, or amusement park.
- Write a poem, song, or rap.







## Handwriting Center

**Materials:** handwriting practice cards, plastic sheet protectors, dry-erase markers, individual practice books or sheets, pencils

Create practice cards for each letter and numeral, and place them in plastic sheet protectors. Identify students who are having difficulty with direction or formation of certain letters or numerals. Write the student’s name in pencil on the back of those practice cards. Students find the card with their name and practice writing the letter or numeral using dry-erase markers. When the student has mastered the letter or numeral, erase the student’s name from the card. Individual practice books or sheets can be added for variety and additional practice.

## Science Center

**Materials:** environmental resources to observe (e.g., plants, rocks, shells, bones, live animals), magnifying lenses, measuring tools, magnets, books, magazines, pictures, question cards, writing and drawing supplies

Establish an area within your classroom dedicated to scientific observation and inquiry. Students can observe, discuss, draw, and label the displayed material. Rotate this display every two to three weeks.

## Speaking and Listening Center

**Materials:** props, costumes, pictures, objects, recorded stories, simple plays, question word cards (*how, why, when, where, who, what*), discussion topics and prompts

Oral language practice is essential to reading and writing development. This is true especially for young children, but ongoing practice with advancing skills is equally important for older students. Ideas for readers at different stages could include:

Beginning	Progressing	Advancing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home center</li> <li>• Puppets</li> <li>• Telephones</li> <li>• Grocery or clothing store</li> <li>• Drama box</li> <li>• Pictures or objects with question word cards</li> <li>• A variety of stories for children to listen to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pictures for students to describe or explain</li> <li>• Pictures of story events for students to retell a familiar story</li> <li>• Pictures of familiar story characters for students to roleplay interviewing</li> <li>• Question word cards</li> <li>• Simple plays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion topics written on cards</li> <li>• Prompts that ask students to describe, explain, ask questions, exchange opinions, and support their thinking</li> <li>• Pictures or objects that challenge students to generate as many questions as they can</li> </ul>



## Words and Letters Center

**Materials:** pictures, letter cards, letter tiles, magnetic letters, word cards, mini whiteboards and markers, game supplies in individual zip-top bags

Provide a variety of games and activities appropriate to students' stage of reading and writing development, which students can use to practice and reinforce foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, discriminating letters and sounds, phonics, high-frequency words, and word analysis. The following are some suggested activities that reinforce a variety of skills:

- **Hearing Phonemes:** Prepare a container of simple picture cards or objects that are represented by a three-sound, three-letter word, e.g., a picture of a cat/dog/rat/mat/pig. Students select a picture or object and try to write the phonemes they can hear. For later stages, add picture cards or objects for longer or more complex words, such as those containing consonant blends and digraphs.
- **Practicing High-Frequency Words:** Write high-frequency words students have learned on cards. Students select a high-frequency word and use letter cards, tiles, or magnetic letters to formulate the word and then write the word.
- **Circling Letters and Words:** Create three different sets of cards: letter cards (*h*), word cards (*house*), and sentence cards (*Here is a house.*) Students choose a sentence card and copy the sentence. Then students select word and letter cards and circle those words and letters in the sentence.
- **Word Family Houses:** Cut out several house shapes and label each one with a common rime, for example, *-ap*, *-op*, *-ip*. Make word cards for students to sort into the appropriate houses.
- **Whiteboard Activity:** Write a set of words on a card, some of which begin with the same letter. Students find the words that begin with the same letter, copy the words onto a whiteboard, and circle the initial letter using a different color. For later stages, include initial blends, digraphs, and various other spelling patterns.
- **Matching Initial Consonants:** Cut pictures from magazines and glue them onto cards. Students match the initial sound of the picture with the appropriate consonant card. For later stages, add initial blends and digraphs.
- **Matching Rhyming Words:** Make word cards using rhyming words. Students read the words and match the pairs that rhyme.
- **Matching Sounds:** Create a set of word cards. First students match words with the same beginning sound, then the same middle sound, and finally the same ending sound.





- **Bingo:** Prepare two cards with a 3x3 grid. Fill each grid with words that start with different initial letters. Create a small card for each initial letter. In groups of three, one student uses the small cards to call out the initial letter. The student with the matching word covers the word with the letter card. For later stages, include blends, digraphs, and other spelling patterns.
- **Compound Words:** Make up cards for each half of a compound word. Students match the cards and write the compound word.
- **Prefixes and Suffixes:** Prepare base word and suffix cards. Students select a base word card and match it with a suffix card to create a new word. At first, make sure the base words do not change spelling when a suffix is added. Later, add prefix cards and extra cards to represent any spelling changes (*hop-p-ing*).
- **Matching Homophones, Synonyms, or Antonyms:** Make up cards with homophones (such as *there* and *their*, *won* and *one*), synonyms, or antonyms. Students find and write the matching pairs.
- **Sorting Singular and Plural:** Prepare base cards divided into the sections Singular and Plural. Create word cards with words that can be sorted into each category. Students can also find words in magazines or newspapers, cut these out, and add them to the sort.
- **Sorting Spelling Patterns:** Make base cards divided into several columns. Write one spelling pattern at the top of each column, such as *ea*, *ai*, *ck*, *ar*, *igh*. Prepare word cards with each spelling pattern. Students place each word in the correct column on the base card.
- **Sorting Words into Categories:** Prepare a variety of word cards. Students select a word from the large container and sort it into the appropriate category, e.g., compound words, suffixes, words that rhyme, words with blends, words in the same family, words with something in common.
- **Sorting Words with Apostrophes:** Prepare base cards divided into the sections Contractions (missing letters) and Possessives (belongs to). Create word cards that can be sorted into each category. Students can also find words in magazines or newspapers, cut these out, and add them to the sort.
- **Using the Dictionary:** Prepare cards for a dictionary search. Students use the dictionary to locate the words. They record the word and page number in their learning center scrapbook and write which word came before and after it.



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