Literacy in the Sciences: Activity No. 9

Teaching Sequence

Kids easily learn that one thing follows another. Their routines at home provide great examples, and are a good introduction to the concept of sequencing. For example, first we eat dinner, then we take a bath, after that we read stories, and finally we turn out the light.

Helping children sequence also develops their scientific inquiry skills. In order to study or observe changes in something, students must follow along and record changes. The changes happen in a particular order, which kids can document by writing or drawing pictures.

Here are a few activities that families can do that provide children with sequencing practice. As you try these, try to include the vocabulary of sequencing, which includes words such as first, then, next, finally, or first, second, third, last.

- Cut or tear out the pages from an old calendar. Mix up the months and hand the stack of pages to your child. Ask your child to order the months from January to December by laying the pages out on the floor. Which month goes first? Then which one? Which month is last?

- Create a "sequence of events" story. Start with a sheet of paper divided into 4 large squares. (For older children, you can create more blank sequence squares on the sheet.) Pick an activity your child is familiar with, such as making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or brushing his teeth. Ask your child to draw the steps of the activity — one step per square in order from beginning to end.

- Use your story time books as models. The books you read together provide a chance to talk about a sequence of events. After you finish a book, ask your child what happened first? And then what happened? How did the book end? To extend this idea, write each event on a separate index card or popsicle stick. Ask your child to put the cards (or sticks) in order.

Providing your child with opportunities to recall events in the correct sequence will help your child as she participates in science exploration and discovery. Understanding sequence also helps your child understand story structure, which in turn builds reading comprehension and writing skills.

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Recommended children's books
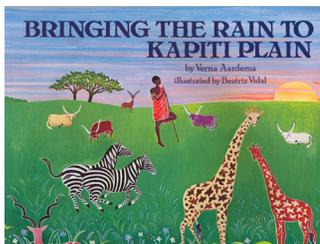
Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain

By Verna Aardema

This African folktale tells the simple story of a cattle herdsman and his wish for rain on the African plain. The narrative structure of the story follows sequentially as the herdsman Ki-pat as he makes a bow and arrow, shoots the arrow into the black rain cloud, observes the change in the weather, and watches the grass grow so that his cows can live. (Ages: 3-6)
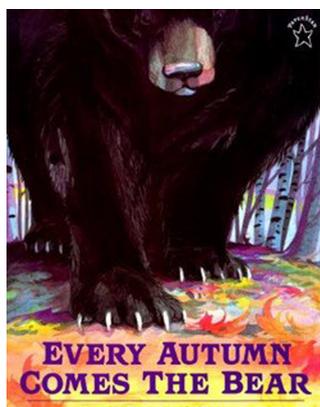
Every Autumn Comes the Bear

By Jim Arnosky

As the seasons change, a large black bear prepares for hibernation. In his search for a den, he startles a bobcat, a grouse, and other smaller animals. Striking watercolors and brief text, drawn from the artist's observations of a bear behind his Vermont home, explain the balance found in nature and the cycles of life. (Ages 3-6)
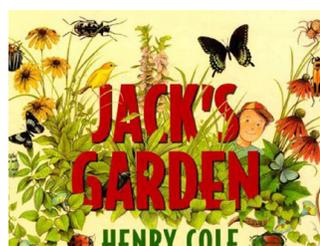
Jack's Garden

By Henry Cole

In this cumulative tale, Jack plants, tends and harvests his garden. Not only will readers follow Jack's activities, they'll learn about gardens and gardening in this informative and animated book through text and highly detailed and well-labeled illustrations. (Ages 6-9)
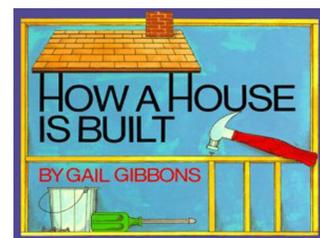
How a House Is Built

By Gail Gibbons

Building a house is a complex project requiring the cooperative efforts of many people. Beginning with the architect who draws the plans, readers meet the surveyors, equipment operators, carpenters, plumbers, and other people who produce a building. The book concludes with a family moving in, ready to make the house a home. (Ages 3-6)