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Contents

About This Book

Time for Talking supports teachers seeking to develop primary students' oral language skills. Nine key language areas are highlighted in separate chapters. Each area is introduced through an explanation of the importance of the skill, how to develop the skill in the classroom, how to reach the at-risk child, and assessment strategies. The core of *Time for Talking* is the fully developed activities related to each key language area.

Time for Talking is organized as a flexible resource. Individual or groups of activities should be chosen throughout the book to meet the unique requirements of each class. It is not meant to be used in a lock-step manner.

A resource section for children's literature as well as a bibliography of sources concludes the book.

Describing

Relevance to Literacy

Descriptive language is increasingly important to classroom success since it enables students to learn about things they have not experienced firsthand. Using descriptive language can trigger creativity and imagination. Descriptive language also helps in reporting perceptions and experiences in a comprehensive manner. In later school years, students use descriptive language to record information in written form for themselves and others. Children need to develop oral proficiency in describing in order to develop critical areas in math and science. For example, accurate description of attributes assists comparisons and categorization.

Mastery of descriptive language encompasses much more than using a wide variety of adjectives. Effective talkers select the most relevant or salient information to tell. They organize the content in a logical way and choose vocabulary to impart precise meaning. For example, using *tartan* versus *plaid*, or *three* rather than *some*.

Stages of Development

Children's first descriptors are mostly adjectives that demonstrate their emerging understanding of the world. The descriptive words are closely related to the development of basic concepts of size, color, shape, and so on. Words that describe verbs (adverbs such as *fast* and *slow*) appear in children's speech at about three years of age. Adverbs with *-ly* endings appear much later. An important development in grammatical complexity occurs when the child begins to flesh out descriptions of things and events by using expanded verb and noun phrases. For example, *The little brown dog was barking*. Complex sentence development allows several ideas to be combined into more concise sentences, such as *The little brown dog* **with the broken leg** *was barking* **ferociously**.

Children's first descriptive analogies are very concrete. Differences are easier to describe than similarities. A major development during the school years is the understanding and use of more abstract figurative language. By eight, children realize that words may have more than one meaning. For example, they begin to realize a word such as *sweet* may have a psychological meaning applied to a personality as well as the sensory meaning of taste.

Students who continue to struggle using descriptive language in the intermediate years often lack organization. Oral language work in the early stages of oral development can help students internalize and organize their thoughts better for speaking, which will improve their later writing. Webs and outlines can be used to develop both descriptive writing and speaking.

The At-Risk Child

Some children find it difficult to draw on their world knowledge and past experience through memory and visualization. They are unable to select the most appropriate ideas or organize their thoughts into a logical order. Their poorly sequenced, irrelevant, or tangential ideas become particularly noticeable in written rather than oral form.

If these students practice oral reporting, and are taught the structure of reports and recounts, they will understand what is required before trying to apply it in writing.

Assessment

The activities in this section will promote children's confidence about speaking to an audience. Children will also learn how to use and monitor tone, volume, pace, intonation, and gesture to enhance meaning. **Recounting** is highlighted in the activities "Paddy," "Just in Case," and "Is News New or Just Old Hat?" **Reporting** is the focus of the remainder of the activities.

Novice Speakers

• Report briefly to a group on personal knowledge about a topic.
• Recount personal experiences.
• Stay on the general topic and ask and respond to questions.
• Ask and answer questions seeking information or clarification.
• Self-correct to clarify meaning.

Maturing Speakers

• When prompted, include key information in a short spoken recount of an experience or event.
• Present information on a known topic with some attention to adequacy and relevance of information.

Observation Guidelines

On page 59 you will find a "Book Talk checklist." It is divided into four areas:
1 Oral Presentation
2 Language Interaction
3 Organization
4 Text Response

Once students are familiar with reports, they can begin to assess their own efforts. See "Plan Your Report" on page 58 of this section.

Plan Your Report

Name _____

My topic is _____

I will talk about

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Self-Assessment   Name _____

✔ **Yes or No**

	Yes	No
I introduced my topic to the class:		
I gave extra information about the topic:		
I put my ideas in order:		
I stood up straight:		
I spoke slowly and clearly:		

Shapes Galore

Students direct a partner to make designs with shapes.
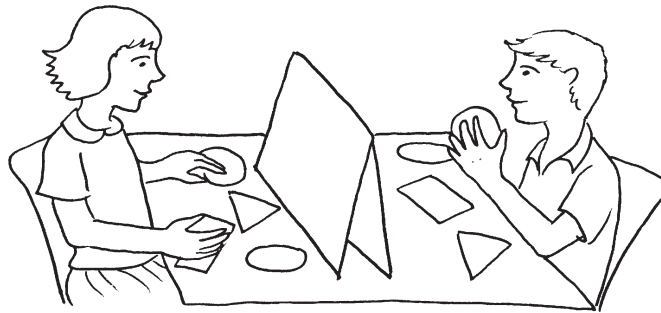
Goals

In this activity students will:

- actively listen for information
- practice giving instructions incorporating concepts of size, shape, color, and spatial relationships
- learn to ask for and give clarification if there has been a misunderstanding

Teacher Notes:

Each player needs a set of shapes in varied colors that match those of their partner. Use the shapes on the blackline master on page 75. A barrier is constructed between players so that players are unable to see each other's pieces.

Vary the number of shapes according to the students' ability level. The first speaker makes a design with the shapes and then gives instructions to a partner to create the same design. When completed, the barrier is withdrawn, the designs compared, and the learning task assessed.

Going Dotty

Students direct a partner to complete a design on paper.

Goals

In this activity students will:

- listen and follow oral directions
- understand specific words, such as *left/right, diagonal,* and number concepts
- practice giving accurate directional information
- learn to clarify and rephrase after miscommunication

Teacher Notes:

Each child needs a copy of the blackline master on page 76 and a pencil. A barrier separates partners who have agreed on a starting point, for example, bottom left corner. The speaker gives the "unsighted" partner directions to join the dots on the grid to complete a pattern or drawing to match his or her own. At the completion of the directions, partners compare designs. The designs will be identical if the communication has been successful. Roles are then reversed so that the listener becomes the speaker for the next turn.

Sniffer

See also: "Sniffer" on page 63.
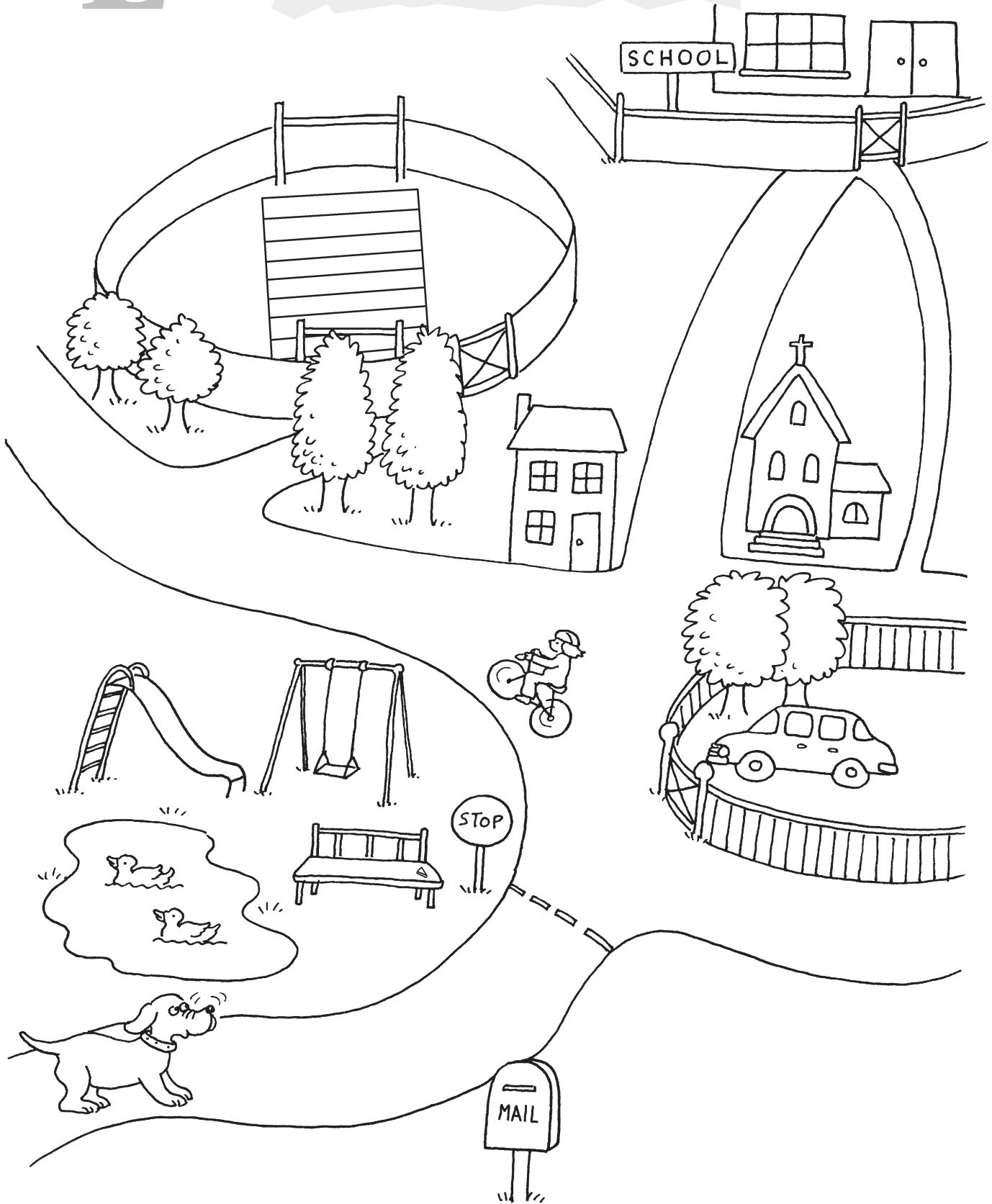
Following Directions

Relevance to Literacy

Primary teachers consistently rate the ability to understand and follow directions as one of the most important skills students need to succeed in school. Unfortunately, failure to follow verbal directions often has social as well as academic consequences.

Since communication is interactive, students need to be able to give messages or directions to others as well as to follow them. In order to be successful in this area, they must be aware of the purpose of the direction, learn the importance of sequence in language, and select language that is accurate and relevant to the task. Too often, the first time we expect ordered and explicit language from children is in their writing.

Give students practice giving information orally to provide them with early oral experiences that focus their thinking and prepare for precise written language. Oral language also allows rehearsal and negotiation of meaning more readily than written language. The child's ability to verbalize the steps needed to achieve an outcome will also encourage more reflective thinking.

Stages of Development

Giving Directions

Children begin to give directions at an early age. Their first directions are usually commands used to get other people to satisfy their needs and wants, for example, *Put these on my feet.* Fortunately, the listener in these early exchanges is usually present and shares an understanding of what the word *these* could mean. By school age, students are able to give simple instructions in a "one-step-at-a-time" fashion. Some, however, find it difficult to appreciate that sometimes the listener does not share the same background knowledge. This awareness of the needs of the listener is slow to develop, and many children up to the age of seven years may fail to orient or provide a background for their audience. As children mature cognitively and begin to see a situation from another's point of view, they begin to provide essential background information and give simple directions in sequence to help others achieve a goal.

In the first years of school, we can expect children to provide up to three steps in sequence, even though they may not orient the listener to the goal of the task or tell all the materials needed to complete the task.