Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Social Studies for Young Children

While social studies is often associated with older students learning about historical dates and maps, it is a vital part of early learning. For young children, social studies can be taught through daily play and routines. It allows children to explore their own identity, families, and communities. Starting this exploration early is essential; it allows young children to discover their identity and place in the world, laying a solid foundation for building confidence and learning how to connect with others.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, social studies learning for young children is an exploration of:

- **Self** - Learning about their unique traits, starting to identify their emotions, and understanding their place within their family.
- **Family** - Getting to know the people who love them, their family roles, and diversity within family structure.
- **Community** – Discovering their local environment and getting to know community members, such as doctors, police officers, and firefighters, who ensure their neighborhood remains safe and welcoming.
- **Geography** – Exploring immediate physical spaces, practicing simple directions like near and far, or looking at a map of the Hawaiian Islands to understand where they live and the world around them.
- **History** – Grasping the basic passage of time through daily routines, talking about what happened yesterday, or looking at photos to discover past/present information about their family and heritage.
- **Civics** – Practicing skills such as sharing, taking turns, following rules, and being a kind helper



In this newsletter, we will explore what social studies look like for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers by focusing on activities that foster their learning of self, family, and community.

This newsletter includes:

- ***Age-specific information and suggestions*** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ***Featured activities*** for each age group,
- ***How This Helps:*** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ***Resources:*** for more information, and
- ***Suggested Books:*** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants



Social studies for infants begins with learning about themselves and the people they love. This early learning helps them understand who they are and how they connect with the world around them. Through simple interactions, such as playing with their hands and toes and making faces in a mirror, children begin to recognize themselves as their own person. They also start building trust and bonding with their caregivers by learning the voices of people who care for them, knowing the difference between family and strangers, and beginning to recognize familiar objects and people within their daily routine.

Engage infants in these activities to support their exploration of social studies by:

- **Learning About Self** – Stand your infant in front of a mirror. Point out and name her physical features, then talk about things she can do, such as "Look at your hands that you use to grab your bottle." "You make beautiful smiles with your lips." This activity helps your infant learn who they are by seeing and identifying her features.
- **Identifying Family Members** – Introduce family members to your infant by having family photo chats. Look at pictures and talk about who is in the family. Family is your infant's first social group and this activity helps her build trust, recognize familiar faces, and understand who cares for her. Family is her first introduction to understanding the wider world and the different roles people play.
- **Exploring the Neighborhood** – Help your infant learn about the neighborhood around her while taking a walk in a stroller or carrier. Point to and narrate what you see, e.g., the moving cars, passing dogs, or rustling trees. This helps your infant start to learn what things are around her in the community.

Activity for Infants: *Mirror Expressions*



What You Need:

A mirror

What to Do:

1. Hold the infant in front of a mirror.
2. Model simple facial expressions (e.g., happy, sad, excited, silly, and surprised) to help the infant associate the feeling with the facial movement.
3. Gently point to your own features (eyes, nose, and mouth) and talk about them while making each face, then encourage the infant to notice their own reflection and reactions.
4. Continue the back-and-forth interaction to encourage their exploration of their own features and the features of others.

Safety tip: Use a shatterproof mirror or ensure it is securely mounted to the wall at the infant's eye level.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Toddlers



Toddlers' development of social studies shifts to self-awareness, community members, and how they interact with others. As their vocabulary grows, they start to identify themselves and close family members by name and show curiosity about community helpers like police officers and firefighters. You can enhance their learning by encouraging them to talk about what makes them or the people they love special. You can also help them process their observations by facilitating pretend play, such as pretending to be a mail carrier or construction worker, and having them talk about what these people do in the community and how they help others.

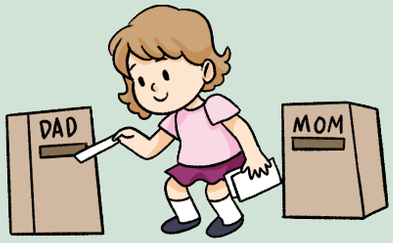
The following are activities that you can do to encourage the development of social studies:

- **All About Me** – Trace the child's outline on a large butcher paper. Allow the child to color in her hair, clothes, fingers, and toes. Talk about the physical features, preferences, and things that make her special and one-of-a-kind.
- **Map Our Family** – Tape printed photos of family members onto a wall or sturdy board at your toddler's eye level. Invite your child to point to or touch each photo as you talk about who they are and their roles in the family and community (e.g., pointing to Mom, who is a nurse and takes care of sick people, or Papa, who is a police officer). Your toddler learns who they are by seeing themselves in relation to their family members and discovering that they belong to a special group with shared names, homes, and routines.
- **Explore Community Elements** – Invite the child to go outside with you and look for community elements. Spot and point to visual anchors like stop signs, fire hydrants, mailboxes, and important places in the community such as hospitals, libraries, and schools. This helps your toddler notice objects in the neighborhood.

Activity for Toddlers: *Mail Carrier Pretend Play*

What You Need:

Envelopes or junk mail
Crayons
Small bag to serve as a mailbag
Stickers to use as postage stamps
Small shoeboxes



What to Do:

1. Set up mailboxes around the room labeled with names of family members or places around the community.
2. Create mail by writing names on envelopes and having the child place a sticker stamp in the corner.
3. Help her sort the envelopes and place them inside the mailbag.
4. Invite her to be the mail carrier and deliver each letter to the person or mailbox matching the name on the envelope.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

Preschoolers actively engage in cooperative play and discover how groups work. As they start to see themselves as part of a larger team, they enjoy creating their own social rules. For example, they might pretend to play "house," naturally dividing themselves into familiar household roles like preparing dinner or cleaning up after playing with toys. Similarly, when building a city with blocks, children often split tasks to accomplish a shared goal, such as one person managing the roads while another constructs houses.

Enhance preschoolers' social studies development with these activities, asking open-ended questions about the world around them to foster their thinking and curiosity.

- ❤ **Keep Myself Safe** – Have the child come up with three simple ways to keep them safe at home or at play, such as "hold hands when crossing the street" or "wear a helmet when riding a bike." Discuss why they are important and how they protect her.

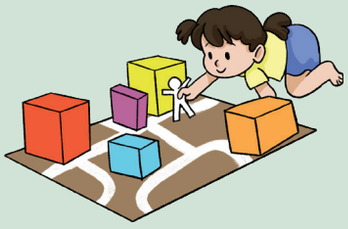


- ❤ **Explore Family History** – Show your child photos of family members (e.g., grandparents) when they were young. Talk about what they were like, what activities they enjoyed, and how life was different back then. This helps children connect with their heritage and understand their family's personal story.
- ❤ **Contribute to Community** – Provide the child with small buckets and child-safe tongs for a "neighborhood clean-up." Walking around your yard or nearby playground to collect leaves, twigs, or rubbish teaches your child her role in the community and the importance of helping others.

Activity for Preschoolers: *Cardboard Box Town*

What You Need:

Small cardboard boxes
Crayons and markers
Large flattened cardboard
Paper cutout of people



What to Do:

1. Lay out a large flattened cardboard box on the floor as the "blueprint" of the town.
2. Help the child draw long, winding roads and crosswalks to connect different parts of the town.
3. Gather small boxes and have the child decorate them to represent their own home or places, like the library, grocery store, post office, police station, fire station, or a park.
4. Add "community helpers" by drawing or using paper cutouts. Place them near their workplaces (e.g., a postal worker by the post office). Engage the child in conversations about how these people help the neighborhood.
5. While you play together, ask questions like, "How does our mail get from the post office to your house?" or "Who can we visit when we go to the park?" to help them visualize real-world roles and relationships.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ❤ Learn through senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching
- ❤ Learn to use her body with intention

Social and Emotional Development

- ❤ Feel important and good about herself
- ❤ Learn to cooperate with others

Language and Literacy Development

- ❤ Develop early reading skills and a love of reading
- ❤ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language



Cognitive Development

- ❤ Increase observation, listening, and understanding skills
- ❤ Develop thinking and problem-solving skills

Kids in the Kitchen

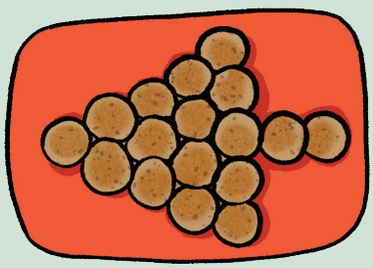
Cooking teaches valuable lessons, including math (quantity, size), science (texture, appearance), fine motor skills (cutting, peeling), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with keiki, discuss kitchen safety. Show them how to handle items safely and allow them to do as much as they are capable of. Praise efforts and ask questions throughout the process to encourage thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Pull-Apart Tree Bread

Adapted from https://www.delish.com/cooking/recipe-ideas/a50528/pull-apart-christmas-tree-recipe/

Ingredients:

- 7 mozzarella sticks
- All-purpose flour, for dusting
- 1 lb store-bought pizza dough, room temperature
- 1 large egg
- 4 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- ½ cup parmesan, finely grated
- 1 Tbsp finely chopped parsley, rosemary, and fresh basil



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 450°. Cut each mozzarella stick into 5 pieces.
2. On a lightly floured surface, divide dough and cut into 2" squares (need 33 squares). Have keiki help wrap each square around a piece of mozzarella and form a tightly sealed ball.
3. Have keiki help arrange balls, seam side down, touching, on a baking sheet in a tree pattern.
4. In a small bowl, beat egg with 1 Tbsp water. Brush egg wash on dough balls.
5. Bake until golden, 15 to 20 minutes.
6. In a small bowl, whisk butter, parmesan, parsley, rosemary, and basil. Brush on tree. Sprinkle with parmesan and parsley before serving.

Resources

Early Childhood in the Social Studies Context

https://www.socialstudies.org/position-statements/early-childhood-social-studies-context

This article shares that social studies is hands-on experiences young children engage in to help them understand themselves, their families, and their community.

Rocking and Rolling. Supporting Curiosity and Inquiry in Early Social Studies

https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/spring2024/rocking-and-rolling

This article highlights how infants and toddlers build foundational social studies concepts through everyday routines and play.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

Making Faces: A First Book of Emotions *by Abrams Appleseed*

This story features large, clear photos of diverse baby faces expressing basic feelings alongside a built-in mirror.

Mommy, Mama, and Me *by Leslèa Newman*

This loving, rhythmic board book captures a baby's daily routine alongside their parents.

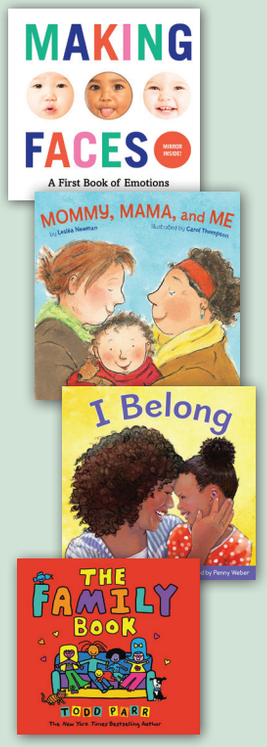
Preschoolers

I Belong *by Cheri J Meiners*

This warm and simple story reassures young children that they have a safe, cozy place in their home and playgroup.

The Family Book *by Todd Parr*

This story explains that families can be big, small, identical, or completely different from one another.



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