



Teachers Resisting Unhealthy  
Children's Entertainment

# TRUCE GUIDE FOR USING CHILDREN'S BOOKS TO PROMOTE PLAY

## PLAY IS CHANGING

- **Less Play at Home.** As children use screens more, including television, tablets, mobile devices, and computers, they have less time to play.
- **Less Play at School.** Today, schools devote more time to worksheets, direct instruction, and screen-based activities so children have fewer opportunities to learn through active, hands-on play.

## SCREEN TIME IS NOT PLAY TIME

Screens involve children in a two-dimensional world as they follow programs created by someone else. There is little room for their own ideas, creativity, and imagination.



## WHEN CHILDREN PLAY...

They are in charge of creating, exploring, cooperating, collaborating, inventing, communicating, and imagining—vital skills for school and for life!

## USE CHILDREN'S BOOKS TO SUPPORT CREATIVE PLAY, EARLY LEARNING, AND LITERACY

This guide helps adults promote quality play and learning, using children's books organized around themes that are interesting to children.

## READ, PLAY, LEARN!

Don't be limited by these books or topics. There are many other children's books and themes that can inspire your children's interests, play and learning.

## PLAY THEMES INSIDE THIS GUIDE:


Cardboard Boxes.....	page 2
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# BOOKS ABOUT PLAYING WITH CARDBOARD BOXES

Playing with boxes of all shapes and sizes, along with “props” such as string, tape, markers, scissors, and toy figures, encourages children to use their imaginations as well as to build foundational STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) skills and concepts. All children benefit from developing interest in these areas.

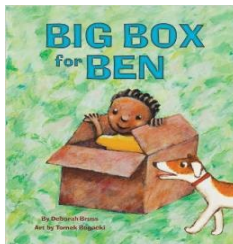
Check out TRUCE’S [Family Play Plan with Cardboard Boxes](http://www.truceteachers.org) at [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org).



**Not a Box**  
by Antoinette Portis.  
Harper Collins Children’s Books, 2008.

**Story:** A simple but powerful story of how a box can be transformed into anything a child wants it to be.

**Ideas for play:** A box can become a race car, a rocket ship, and many other things. Try using small boxes for hiding things or large boxes, big enough for hiding children and more.



**A Big Box for Ben**  
by Deborah Bruss. Tomek Books, 2011.

**Story:** Ben’s ordinary big box enables him and Wags, his dog, to take off on some imaginary adventures, as he turns his box into a variety of vehicles.

**Ideas for play:** Using your imagination, what can you make your box become? Where would you like your box to take you for an adventure?



**Sitting in My Box**  
by Dee Lilligard. Two Lions, 2015.

**Story:** A boy sits in a box and is joined by several animals.

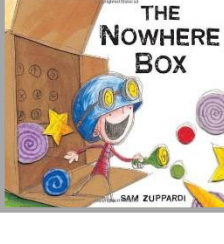
**Ideas for play:** What animals can join you in your box?



**A Box Story**  
by Kenneth Kit Lamug. Rabble Box, 2011.

**Story:** A box can be many things!

**Ideas for play:** What can you make with a big box? With a small box? What can you keep in a box? What’s inside your box?



**The Nowhere Box**  
by Sam Zuppardi. Candlewick, 2013.

**Story:** George’s little brothers wreck his toys and games and trail after him. George has had enough, so he finds an empty washing machine box and goes to the one place where his brothers can’t follow.

**Ideas for play:** George creates a space just for him. How can you create your own space with a big box? What can you put in it? What would you do in it?



**Christina Katerina and the Box**  
by Patricia Lee Gauch. Boyds Mills Press, 2012.

**Story:** The day the refrigerator arrives in its large brown carton, Christina Katerina and her mother are both excited, but for very different reasons. Christina quickly claims the box that the refrigerator came in.

**Ideas for play:** How could you make a castle, a clubhouse, and other wonderful things with your box? What else can you make with your box?

# BOOKS ABOUT PLAYING WITH CAPES, WANDS, & DRESS-UPS



Children love to wave magic wands (or sticks) to turn frozen “statues” into running and happily screaming little children! Powerful capes (or pillowcases) provide protection from dangers—such as scary little friends or pretend monsters—lurking in their yard, on the sidewalk, or hiding under a table. While wearing tool belts (made of an old belt or piece of fabric) that hold their string, flashlight, and a hammer, children can creatively fix or tinker indoors or outside.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE



STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK

## Where the Wild Things Are

by Maurice Sendak. Harper, Collins, 1964.

**Story:** In this beloved story, Max puts on his wolf suit and travels to the land of the monsters where he is crowned king.

**Ideas for play:** How could you make a wolf suit like Max's? How could you make a crown and become king of the Wild Things? How could you make a monster costume?

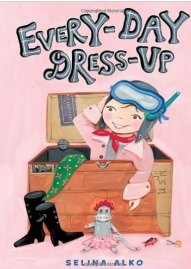


## Princess Super Kitty

by Antoinette Portis. Harper Collins, 2011.

**Story:** Maggie first decides that she's not a little girl, but that she's a kitty with cat ears and a tail. Then, she becomes Super Kitty and finally Princess Super Kitty.

**Ideas for play:** What did Maggie use to turn herself into Princess Super Kitty? Can you pretend to be a kitty? What can you be that you make up yourself?

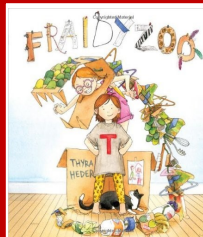


## Every-Day Dress-Up

by Selina Alko. Borzoie Books, 2011.

**Story:** A little girl like to play princess, but Mommy tells her stories of real, great women. Now she dresses up like Amelia Earhart, Ella Fitzgerald, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Marie Curie.

**Ideas for play:** Is there a famous woman that you would like to dress up as? What could you use to make a costume to look like her?



## Fraidy Zoo

by Thyra Heder, Abrams Books, 2013.

**Story:** Little T is afraid to go back to the zoo, but she can't remember why. To help her remember, her mom, dad, and sister make homemade animal costumes and act out zoo animals.

**Ideas for play:** Can you pretend to be a zoo animal? What can you use to you make an animal costume? What are the biggest and smallest animals you can be?



## The Sunflower Sword

by Mark Sperring. Andersen Press Picture Books, 2011.

**Story:** A little knight dreams of being big and brave enough to conquer dragons. He asks his mother for a sword, but she gives him a sunflower instead. The little knight meets a real dragon who notices the sunflower. The dragon thinks that the little knight wants to be friends. Together they stop all fighting in the kingdom.

**Ideas for play:** The little knight makes a helmet. How can you make your own helmet? What can you use for a sword? How can you make friends instead of fighting, like the little knight and the dragon?

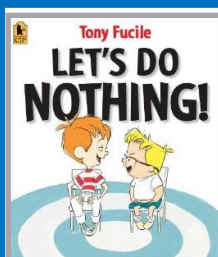


# BOOKS ABOUT PLAYING WHEN FEELING BORED



Today, when children say they are bored or “have nothing to do,” they often turn to a screen. However, boredom can be a great learning opportunity for your child.

Unstructured time allows children opportunities to relax with their favorite toy or book or just to daydream. Boredom encourages children to rely on their own problem-solving skills, so that bored time can create great learning opportunities and can even become quality play time.

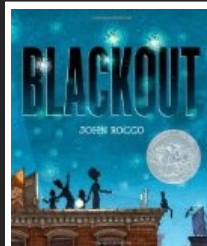


## Let's Do Nothing

by Tony Fucile. Candlewick Press, 2012.

**Story:** Frankie and Sal have already played every sport and board game, baked cookies, and painted pictures. What's left to do?

**Ideas for play:** What would happen if you tried to do nothing at all? Could you do nothing at all for 10 seconds, like the boys in the book?



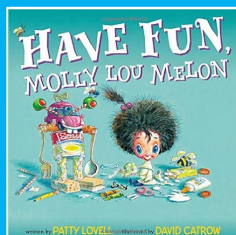
## Blackout

by John Rocco, Disney-Hyperion, 2011.

**Story:** On a hot summer night, all the power goes out. There are no TVs, phones, or computers. What can the family do? They go up on the roof and enjoy the stars and talking to neighbors.

They have time to play a board game, too.

**Ideas for play:** Look at the stars on a clear night. What else can you play and do when there is no power?

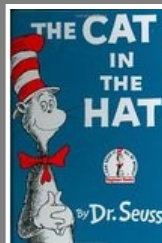


## Have Fun, Molly Lou Melon

by Patty Level. G. P. Putnam Sons, 2012.

**Story:** Gertie has the latest toys and is bored. But Molly Lou's grandmother taught her to make her own playthings from found objects.

**Ideas for play:** How could you make a toy from something you find outdoors or in your house?



## The Cat in the Hat

By Dr. Seuss. Random House, 1957.

**Story:** The children are bored until the Cat in the Hat shows up.

**Ideas for play:** If an imaginary friend like the Cat in the Hat showed up at your house at a time when you were bored, what would you do together?

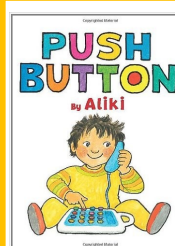


## Orson Blasts Off!

by Raul Colon. Atheneus, 2004.

**Story:** When Orson's computer breaks, he is angry that he can't play computer games and doesn't know what to do. Then a jack-in-the-box suggests that Orson step outside and his adventure begins.

**Ideas for play:** Orson's computer games gave him ideas for playing. Like Orson, how could you make up imaginary games, based on some computer games you play?



## Push Button

by Alike. Greenwillow Books, 2010.

**Story:** The little boy loves to push buttons—TVs, toasters, and elevators—but one day his button-pushing finger is sore and bandaged. Now what will he do to play? He discovers he likes to read, do puzzles, dig, slide, paint, and hammer. By the time his finger heals, he realizes that he can do all of those things and push buttons, too.

**Ideas for play:** What would you like to do if you couldn't push any buttons?

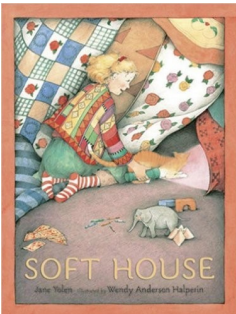


# BOOKS ABOUT BUILDING FORTS OR PLAY HOUSES

Piling up pillows and blankets, covering a table or chair, or hiding in small spaces encourage children to create their own secret worlds. Dragging old blankets or sheets outside or finding scraps of wood to build a fort or clubhouse allows children the space, time, and opportunity to work together towards a common goal.

While make-believe play may seem simple, it actually helps children develop vital skills: planning, designing, experimenting, estimating, measuring, testing, and teamwork.

Check out TRUCE's [Family Play Plans for Forts](http://www.truceteachers.org) at [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org).



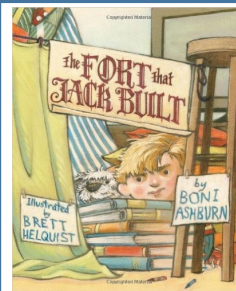
## Soft House

by Jane Yolen, Candlewick Press, 2005.

**Story:** Alison and her little brother, Davey, are stuck inside on a rainy day. They decide to play Davey's favorite game, "Soft House." They gather blankets and pillows and use the sofa for walls. Once

their soft house is built, they play inside its cozy space, with a flashlight to provide light. Mama brings cookies for a snack.

**Ideas for play:** Alison and Davey, although different ages, have fun building their soft house together. Do you have a brother, sister, cousin, or friend who would like to build a soft house with you? What can go inside your soft house?

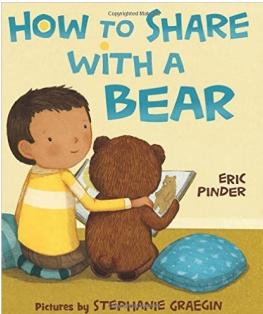


## The Fort that Jack Built

by Boni Ashburn, Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2013.

**Story:** Based on the nursery rhyme, "The House That Jack Built," young Jack builds an amazing fort in the middle of the living room, using the chairs, blankets, books, a shower curtain, pillows, and other found objects. However, those objects belong to family members, who takes them back, one by one, until Jack no longer has a fort. Fortunately, Grandma comes to the rescue.

**Ideas for Play:** What objects in your house can you use to built an inside fort?



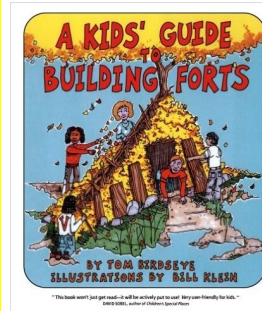
## How to Share with a Bear

by Eric Pinder, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2015.

**Story:** Thomas builds a cave for himself—but suddenly, he finds a bear in it. He tries to lure the bear out of his cave with berries, honey,

and other things that tempt a bear. When the bear tries to get into the cave, it's too small, so Thomas and the bear (who is really his little brother in bear jammies) build a cave big enough for both of them.

**Ideas for play:** Can you follow the pictures at the end of the book to make your own cave with pillows, cushions, and blankets?



## A Kids' Guide to Building Forts

by Tom Birdseye, Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1993.

**Story:** This is a comprehensive guide for older children, outlining how to build all kinds of forts—outside forts, snow forts, and inside forts. The last part is "finishing touches for the inside of your fort," whether it's outside or inside.

**Ideas for play:** Which fort would you like to build? Who could help you build it? Will you build it inside or outside? When it's finished, what will you put inside?





# BOOKS ABOUT PLAYING OUTDOORS

In today's world, children have fewer opportunities to play outdoors. At school, recess has been shortened or eliminated. At home, more screen-time, scheduled activities, and adult concerns about outdoor safety contribute to less outdoor play time. Outdoor play gives children different play opportunities than are found indoors. While running, jumping, skipping, and climbing, children gain increased strength, coordination, and overall health. Valuable lessons are learned through nature play—observing, smelling, touching, and asking questions about clouds, buds, seedlings, insects, birds, and worms. Children use their imaginations to make up and play games while using their problem-solving skills to create and follow rules. Inexpensive play items, such as balls and sidewalk chalk, can lead to great outdoor play. Expensive toys are rarely needed.

Find more ideas for children's outdoor play at [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org), including: TRUCE Family Play Plans for [Mud](#); [Water](#); [Chalk](#); [Leaves](#), [Gardening](#); and [Snow](#).



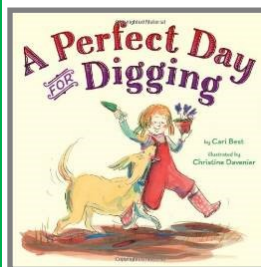
## Go Out and Play!

by KaBOOM. Candlewick Press, 2012.

**Story:** There is no story, but this book includes a comprehensive collection of descriptions and rules for favorite children's games.

Wonderful photos and illustrations are included.

**Ideas for play:** Which games do you like to play — tag games, ball games, team games, sidewalk games, circle games, race games, or games with no rules?

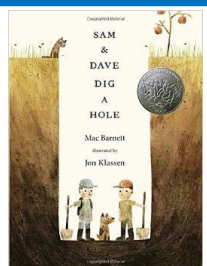


## A Perfect Day for Digging

by Cari Best. Two Lions Press, 2014.

**Story:** Nell and her dog Rusty love to dig in the dirt, but their neighbor, Norman, doesn't want to get dirty. Then they dig up unexpected treasures.

**Ideas for play:** Explore the fun of digging in the dirt. What treasures do you think you'll find?



## Sam and Dave Dig a Hole

by Mac Barnett. Candlewick Press, 2014.

**Story:** Sam and Dave are on a mission to find something spectacular, so they dig a hole and keep digging.

**Ideas for play:** Digging a hole together is fun. What will you use to dig your hole—a shovel, a spoon, your hands? How does the dirt feel? Where will you put the dirt that you have taken out of the hole? What do you think that you will find?

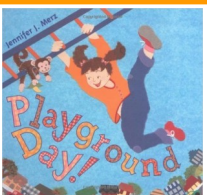


## A Stick is an Excellent Thing

by Marilyn Singer. Clarion Books, 2012.

**Story:** Short poems and beautiful illustrations celebrate outdoor activities, ranging from hide-and-seek to making mud soup. A bonus is that these activities cost nothing!

**Ideas for play:** Try all the play ideas in the book. What else can you play outside without spending money on supplies and equipment?



## Playground Day

 by Jennifer Merz, Clarion Books, 2007.

**Story:** The little girl is so happy that it's Playground Day. As she plays on the equipment, she pretends to be different animals.

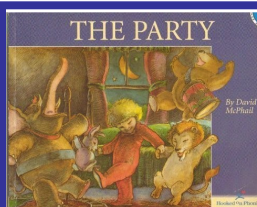
**Ideas for play:** How can you hop like a bunny? Climb like a monkey? Slide like a penguin? What other animals can you be?



# BOOKS ABOUT PLAYING INDOORS

Some of children's richest play can happen indoors. They can make up stories or act out plays with their favorite dolls, stuffed animals, and household items. They can work together to complete a puzzle, build a tower, or bake some cookies. Indoor play with other children can provide valuable opportunities for developing such vital social skills as sharing and cooperation through direct, give-and-take interactions.

Find more ideas for indoor play at [www.truceachers.org](http://www.truceachers.org), including: TRUCE Family Play Plans for [string](#), [playdough](#), and [socks](#).

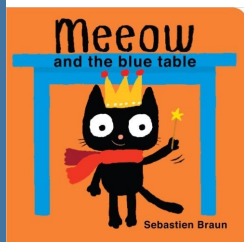


## The Party

by David McPhail.  
Little Brown and Company, 1990.

**Story:** A young boy and his stuffed animals dance, play with balloons, ride an electric train, and raid the refrigerator after Dad falls asleep while reading a bedtime story.

**Ideas for play:** What can you and your stuffed animals play together?



## Meeow and...

### The Blue Table

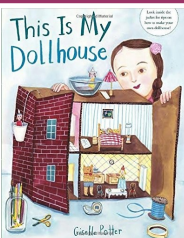
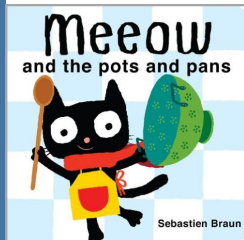
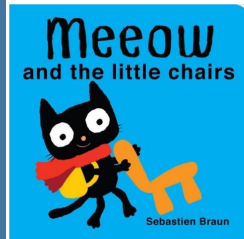
### The Little Chairs

### The Pots and Pans

by Sebastien Braun.  
Boxer Books, 2012.

**Story:** It's a rainy day and Meeow must play inside. He has fun with everyday objects that he finds indoors. Perfect for children as young as two.

**Ideas for play:** What could you do with a table, some chairs, and some pots and pans? What other things can you find in your house for play?

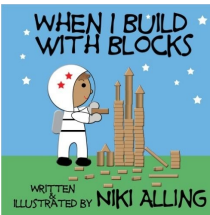


## This Is My Dollhouse

by Giselle Potter. Schwartz and Wade, 2016.

**Story:** A girl makes a dollhouse from a cardboard box, constructing the furniture and even an elevator and a swimming pool. But her friend has a store-bought dollhouse.

**Ideas for play:** How could you make a dollhouse? What would you put in it?

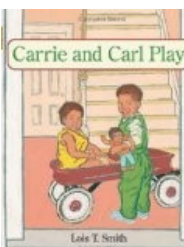


## When I Build with Blocks

by Niki Alling. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012.

**Story:** Children use their imagination to create many different block structures.

**Ideas for play:** How could you make outer space or the ocean with blocks? What else could you make?

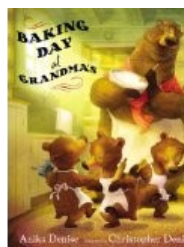


## Carrie and Carl Play

by Lois T. Smith. Candlewick Press, 2007.

**Story:** Toddlers Carrie and Carl play together and with their parents at home.

**Ideas for play:** What can you build with blocks? Want to play hide and seek? What can you do with pots and pans? Can you make a mask out of a paper plate like Carl did?



## Baking Day at Grandma's

by Anika Denise, Philomel Books, 2014

**Story:** Three little cubs go to Grandma's house, where they bake a chocolate cake, with breaks for hot chocolate and dancing. The book includes the recipe for the cake.

**Ideas for play:** What would you like to cook? Grandma's chocolate cake? Cookies? Something for dinner tonight? Who could help you cook?





## PLAY BUILDS A FOUNDATION FOR VALUABLE INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

- When children play with materials like boxes and blocks, they are working on early science and math concepts such as counting, sorting, patterning, balance, estimation, and measurement.
- When children scribble, paint, and draw, they may discover that the lines, shapes, and “funny squiggles” they’ve made can stand for something else—an object in the real world, letters, or even words.
- When children play make-believe, they are learning even more about representation—how to make one thing stand for another. This is a vital early step in learning to recognize how written letters and numbers work:



- ◇ Pretend play improves vocabulary, comprehension, and recall.
- ◇ Play with dolls, stuffed animals, or open-ended materials develops imagination and logical thinking.
- ◇ Play with other children builds social and language skills.



### FIND THE BOOKS LISTED IN THIS GUIDE AT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY OR SCHOOL LIBRARY.

Also, use your child’s favorite books and other children’s books you have at home to encourage the kind of play suggested in this guide.



Build on your child’s ideas about the books, as well as key themes in the books.

### PARENTS & TEACHERS: SHARE YOUR IDEAS!

- Did you try any of these books? What worked for you and your child/students? What other books would you suggest?
- We will post selected reader feedback on our website. Contact us at: [truce@truce teachers.org](mailto:truce@truce teachers.org)
- Share on Facebook, too. Search for: [TRUCEteachers](https://www.facebook.com/TRUCEteachers)

