LITERACY KITS

“The stories we love best do live in us forever.” —JK Rowling

Reading is critical to children’s education. Kids who aren’t reading at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.\(^1\) Unfortunately, 68% of fourth graders in the US do not meet national proficiency levels.\(^2\) United Way is working around the world to boost children’s literacy rates and we’re thrilled to have you join the effort.

Literacy kits provide great opportunities for kids to develop creative thinking, a personal and positive connection to reading, and language and literacy skills. In addition to giving children the tools to succeed, organizing a literacy kits project also helps your organization:

- Build support and a positive reputation
- Create personal relationships in the community
- Share your story
- Recruit potential future members

Find more information on children’s literacy at [earlygradereading.unitedway.org](http://earlygradereading.unitedway.org).

WHAT IT IS

Literacy kits bring books to life. A kit is a container filled with a book and a related activity to make story time more interactive.

This project centers on a day in which volunteers gather to assemble books and construct activities. The kits are then donated to a pre-determined organization, which could be a school, after-school program, library, recreation center, place of worship or group of teachers, child care workers or volunteer readers. If the organization chooses, kits may then be sent home to allow parents to read with their children and reinforce the learning.

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\(^1\) [Early Grade Reading Toolkit](http://earlygradereading.unitedway.org)

\(^2\) [U.S. Department of Education](http://education.gov)
MATERIALS
Be creative! Materials could include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aluminum foil</td>
<td>Model objects such as coins, buttons, or other materials you can use to model or create shapes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buttons</td>
<td>Paper produce baskets, sticks, or any other materials you can use to build or construct.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction paper</td>
<td>Pasta, e.g. noodles, can be used to create paper mache or other artistic projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crayons</td>
<td>Popscicle sticks, can be used for drawing or creating shapes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glue stick</td>
<td>Paper or pipe cleaners, can be used to attach materials together.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Googly” eyes</td>
<td>Q-tips, can be used to create eyes for various projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hole punch</td>
<td>Recyclables—cardboard boxes from bottled water; caps from cans; toilet paper and towel rolls, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Label maker</td>
<td>Rubber stamps, can be used to create labels for your projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loofahs</td>
<td>Scissors, can be used to cut various materials.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Markers</td>
<td>Sparkles, can be used for various projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modeling clay</td>
<td>Non-hardening, can be used to create shapes or objects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponges</td>
<td>Different shapes, can be used for various artistic projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staplers</td>
<td>String or yarn, can be used for various projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tape</td>
<td>In bright colors, can be used for various artistic projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toothbrushes</td>
<td>For painting, can be used to create various designs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watercolors</td>
<td>Can be used to dye noodles, can be used for various artistic projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White coffee filters</td>
<td>To cut different shapes, can be used for various projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire</td>
<td>Thin and malleable, plastic-coated, can be used for various projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HOW TO DO IT

1. **Brand the effort as a United Way experience** – Include the United Way logo and name on bookplates, containers and other items to create consistency and awareness of who is behind the effort. Talk with your local United Way to find out about current literacy efforts and run your materials by them to double-check that they follow brand guidelines.
   - Use the official United Way logo, United Way colors and Trade Gothic or Meta fonts.
   - Consider including the logos of your school and the organization receiving the donations.

2. **Choose an organization** – Who will use the kits? Find an organization that will benefit from having the kits. Ask them:
   - the age of the children receiving the kits,
   - where the kits will be stored, and
   - what books and items would be most useful.

3. **Find a location** – How many volunteers do you expect? How many will you invite? Visit the location ahead of time to ensure it can accommodate the maximum possible number of volunteers with enough space to spread out supplies and create arts projects. This might be your local United Way office, a university basketball court, an eating or lounging area or an unoccupied classroom. Don’t forget to reserve the spot well in advance!

4. **Collect books** – Make sure the books match the organization’s requested age range. You can hold a book drive or establish a relationship with an organization like your college and ask employees to donate books.

5. **Recruit volunteers** – Invite your friends personally. Post on all your social media sites. If your college or academic department has an email listserv, see if you can submit information about the effort. Table and put up flyers. Do whatever you think might be most effective.

6. **Assemble supplies in advance** – Be prepared! Buy all the supplies ahead of time. Containers for the kits should be attractive, practical and easy-to-carry—especially if the kits will travel to and from home. You might consider using a clear bin, bucket, box, backpacks, bags or folders with pockets.
   - **Instructions**: Each kit needs instructions on how to use it. You can print and laminate information about what is in each kit and how it should be used.

7. **Create the kits** – It’s time!
   - Welcome volunteers and give a brief, informal presentation about United Way and why the literacy kits are relevant to the community and United Way’s focus on education.
b. Be prepared to talk about reading program opportunities in case volunteers want to pledge to become a volunteer reader, tutor or mentor. You can always direct them to the United Way volunteer website.

c. Take photos! Post them on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or other social media sites. Mention us @UnitedWay @StudentUnitedWay #LiveUnited

d. Set aside time at the end to clean up and reflect on the experience with the volunteers.

EXAMPLE
United Way of Central Iowa, Women’s Leadership Connection
Kits donated to: early learning centers and in-home childcare providers
Book used: Lunch by Denise Fleming
Cost for 100 kits: $600.00 ($6 per kit)

SUPPLIES USED
• large Ziploc
• laminated sheet of paper with fruit, vegetables and mouse
• paper lunch bag
• binder rings
• scissors or paper cutter
• hole punch
• instructions for using the kit

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE KIT
These activities can occur in one setting or in several. The skills that can be developed through these activities include: alphabetical knowledge, alliteration, color identification, sequencing, story retelling, prediction, healthy food choices, oral expression, and fine and large motor skills.

As you read the book Lunch:
• Ask the child to identify the types of fruits or vegetables and their colors
• Ask the child if they have eaten those fruits and vegetables; share if you have as well
• Discuss the importance of having fruits and vegetables in your diet
• Discuss what you could make/bake/cook with the fruits and vegetables

Additional activities:
• A memorable meal: Place the laminated fruit and vegetable pieces in the paper lunch bag and explain that the mouse has packed his lunch for the day but can’t remember in what order he likes to eat it. With the children, remove the cards from the lunch bag. As you read the story, place the food cards on the table in the order the mouse eats the foods in the story. After all the cards have been sequenced, reread the story. As you read, pick up each appropriate food and place it back in the bag.
• Get ready for lunch: Get little ones excited by participating in this pre-reading activity. Take a paper plate and hold it up. Share with the children your favorite lunchtime food. Then pass the plate to the child beside you. After they name their favorite lunchtime food, pass the plate to the next child. Have the children continue to pass the plate around until each child has had the opportunity to name their favorite lunchtime food. Then have the children settle in as you read this tasty-tempting tale Lunch.
• Sing a song: Use the tune of “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” Sing a verse for each fruit and vegetable that the mouse eats (carrot, corn, grapes, etc.)
  Oh, the mouse will eat (carrots) for his lunch
  Oh, the mouse will eat (carrots) for his lunch
  With a smack and a slurp
  And a tiny mouse burp,
  Oh, the mouse will eat (carrots) for his lunch!