



## K-12 Literacy Ideas for Programs and Families

**What to do:** Review these activities and highlight the ones you'd like to try. Some activities focus on literacy and directly teach literacy skills, while others embed literacy without providing direct instruction. Implement explicit and embedded literacy activities regularly in your program to support students at all levels of literacy development.

**Why it matters:** Rich literacy experiences promote learning across various topics and situations. Helping students develop literacy skills in enjoyable ways helps them connect school-day learning to personal goals and interests.

### Elementary School Activities

#### Storybook Circle

Each day, break students into small groups and have an adult read aloud to them. As reading skills improve throughout the year, have students take the lead and ask them to practice reading with emotion. Focus on developing fluency. Hold a brief book discussion after each session.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit

#### WebQuest

Each week, develop an online "scavenger hunt" where students explore a topic of interest (e.g., something they are learning about during the school day). Have them decipher clues, follow directions, and conduct research to learn more about the topic. Emphasize research skills, digital literacy and safety, and reading along the way. Have students create a visual display to present their findings.

*Literacy Instruction:* Embedded

#### Sight Word Memory

Using sight word memory cards, have students in pairs or groups of three play a game of "memory" or "concentration" by trying to find a match. Students should say each word aloud when flipping over the cards. Assign groups by skill level.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit

#### Find a "Just Right" Book

Show younger students how to choose a "just right" book using the Five Finger Rule: (1) Pick a book you think you'll like. (2) Read the second page. (3) Hold up a finger for each word you don't know or aren't sure you know. (4) If you're holding up five fingers or more, pick a book that's easier for you. (5) But if you're not yet ready to give up on your first choice, try the five finger rule on two more pages.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit



### Weekend Update

On Monday or Friday afternoons, ask a few students to talk about their weekend activities — either what they did or will do. Have students who prefer not to share aloud write a few sentences or draw a quick picture of their answer.

*Literacy Instruction:* Embedded

### Middle School Activities

#### Debate Club

Every two weeks, introduce a position statement related to something they're learning in school. For example, if they're studying nutrition, the statement might be "Sugary snacks shouldn't be allowed at school." Split students into two groups — one for and one against the statement — and give them a week to research the topic and hone their arguments. Have students engage in proper [debate](#) the following week. Allow time for them to debrief and reflect after the debate.

*Literacy Instruction:* Embedded

#### Life as a Pilgrim

In the fall, read aloud or have students read historical fiction that depicts life as a Pilgrim at Plymouth Colony. After reading the book, have students find facts about the size of the Mayflower and measure and mark an outline with chalk or small play equipment in an outdoor area.

*Literacy Instruction:* Embedded

#### Find a "Just Right" Book

Show students how to use the I PICK strategy to choose a book that's "just right" for them: (1) **I** choose a book. (2) **Purpose:** Why do I want to read it? (3) **Interest:** Does the book interest me? (4) **Comprehension:** Am I understanding what I'm reading? (5) **Know:** Do I know most of the words? This strategy originated with authors Gail Boushey and Joan Moser.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit

#### Share a Read Aloud

Have students record themselves reading stories aloud. Share the videos or audio recordings with students' families. Make sure to follow the program protocols for using technology.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit

### High School Activities

#### Spoken Word

Have students perform poems they have selected or written themselves. Try introducing a different theme each week to use as the starting point around which students select or create a piece to perform. Allow time during the week for students to craft their performance and work on their public speaking and performance skills. Consider having the students perform at a local poetry night, or set one up specifically for the program.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit



**Program Marketing Team**

Have students work with program leaders to design effective ways to market the program and program activities. Tasks can include creating visual displays, flyers, posters, and other marketing aids. Students can also craft messages and images for the program social media channels. Make sure to monitor the students' messages for appropriate content.

*Literacy Instruction:* Embedded

**Writers Workshop**

While reading both fiction and nonfiction texts, have students provide written responses to questions about specific literary elements. Later, have students work with the instructor or in small groups to discuss and refine their written responses. Check out the 21st CCLC NTAC Writers Workshop tool.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit

**Family (Adult and Student) Activities****Night at the Museum**

Students choose a famous person or event from history. For several weeks, students read about their figure or event. The culminating family night is a "wax museum" where students dress as their character and families and community partners stop at the "exhibits" to learn about each person or event. This activity can easily be modified into another theme, such as "Holidays Around the World" wax museum, "Inventors" wax museum, or something chosen by your staff or students.

*Literacy Instruction:* Embedded

**Movie Night**

Host an outdoor movie night. Have a partner provide food, such as hotdogs and hamburgers. Prepare vocabulary bingo cards in advance and have participants listen for the words on their cards and call out if they get bingo! Then, after the movie, facilitate a conversation about the movie. Make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Add to the fun by offering books as door prizes.

*Literacy Instruction:* Embedded

**Story Sleuths**

Set up as a mystery theme, families complete a scavenger hunt throughout the building. At each stopping point, they have an opportunity to read together or participate in a literacy-themed activity. Examples of stations include reading together with detective spyglasses, working as a family team to find words in text during "sight word bingo," and inviting the community library to sign up families for library cards. At each station, you can also place follow-up questions about the plot of the story.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit



**Family Dinner Night**

Host a potluck or partner-provided dinner to motivate attendance. As dinner entertainment, have someone — perhaps a local writer, artist, musician, or actor — read a story while people eat, and then let families talk about the story as they do a related craft or activity. This is a good way to get families talking with each other.

*Literacy Instruction:* Embedded

**Family Folk Story**

Have parents share a family folk story or fairy tale by writing it out as a series of captions in blocks on the bottom half of sheets of paper. Then, have students illustrate the story above the captions. This activity can be completed during a family engagement event or at home.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit

**Family Reading Night**

Hold a Family Reading Night, open to all students and their families, at regular intervals throughout the program year. Ask students and families to share a book as they picnic, go on a library tour, or engage in fun reading games. Consider providing books that students can choose to take home with them and keep.

*Literacy Instruction:* Explicit

This resource was developed in 2024 by the Nita M. Lowey 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC), funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Department) and administered by Synergy Enterprises, Inc. under Cooperative Agreement No. 287E230009 with the Department's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the Department or the federal government. This resource is in the public domain and is available at [21stcclcntac.org](https://21stcclcntac.org). Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted.

