

Construction Area | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're testing different ways to make it stronger..."

"You've changed your design..."

"You're comparing those two ideas..."

Describe:

"That wide base is helping it stay balanced."

"You've reinforced that part to make it stronger."

"I can see you've made that side symmetrical."

"Those pieces are supporting the weight above."

"You've solved that problem by..."

Stretch:

"How could you make it even stronger?"

"Which part was the trickiest to build? Why?"

"If you built it again, what would you change?"

Descriptive Vocabulary for construction play

Building & Materials:

stacked

slotted

clicked

joined

connected

interlocked

layered

supported

reinforced

Building & Engineering:

foundation

framework

support

reinforce

interlock

connect

anchor

stabilise

Structure & Shape:

symmetrical/asymmetrical

balanced

stable

rigid

curved

angled

vertical

horizontal

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"Why do you think that worked?"

"How did you solve that problem?"

"What could you change to make it more stable?"

"If someone else wanted to build this, what instructions would you give them?"

REMEMBER!

Comment first, question last.

Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting/questioning.

Avoid: "What is it?"

Follow the child's lead.

Name strategies and engineering thinking.

Celebrate adapting, testing and problem-solving.

Encourage children to explain their reasoning and listen to each other's ideas.

Small World Play | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're creating a story."

"You're giving each character a different job..."

"You've introduced a new character..."

Describe:

"You've added an exciting twist."

"The setting has changed, so the story feels different."

"That problem is making your characters think carefully."

"Your characters are working together to solve it."

Stretch:

"I'm thinking... something exciting is about to happen..."

"What problem could make the story even more exciting?"

"Could there be another way to solve that problem?"

Storytelling vocabulary for small world play

Starting a Story:

"One ordinary day..."

"Deep in the forest..."

"Long ago..."

Building a Story:

They discovered...

She decided...

They searched...

He escape...

She protected...

They solved...

He rescue...

She investigated...

They persuaded...

They returned...

Story Connectives:

first, next, meanwhile, because, however, although, afterwards, eventually, finally

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"How is your character feeling now? What makes you think that?"

"What could happen that nobody is expecting?"

"How might the story end differently?"

"If this became a book, what would you call it?"

REMEMBER!

Comment first, question last.
Model rich storytelling language naturally.

Follow the child's lead
Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting/questioning.

Avoid: "What's happening?"

Creative Area | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're experimenting with different materials."
"You've changed your idea as you've worked."
"You're combining different colours and textures."

Describe:

"You've created an interesting pattern."
"That texture reminds me of..."
"You've added lots of careful detail."

Stretch:

"What inspired your idea?"
"Tell me about your choices."
"What might you add next?"
"How could you create a different effect?"

Descriptive Vocabulary

Artistic:

colour
shade
pattern
texture
shape
line
space
detail

Colour &

Tone:

bright
bold
pale
dark
light
soft
vibrant
muted

Play Inspiration

Create alongside children without demonstrating a 'right way'.
Explore how different tools make different marks.
Design something for a purpose (a crown, bridge, puppet or costume).
Revisit previous creations and adding, adapting or improving them.

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"How did you create that effect?"
"Which material worked best?"
"How does your artwork make you feel?"
"What title would you give your creation?"
"What would you like someone to notice first?"

REMEMBER!

Comment first, question last.
Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting/questioning.

Process over product.

Comment on choices, not just the finished piece.

There isn't a 'right way' to be creative.

Encourage children to explain their thinking and creative decisions.

Sand Area | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're investigating what the sand can do."
"You're comparing different tools."
"You're testing your idea."

Describe:

"That sand feels much finer."
"You've packed the sand tightly to make it stronger."
"You're comparing size, shape and capacity."
"That tool has made a different pattern."

Stretch:

"Which tool works best? Why?"
"How could you make it stronger?"
"I wonder what would happen if..."
"What could your creation become?"

Descriptive Vocabulary

Texture &

Feel:

dry
wet
soft
gritty
smooth
rough
crumbly
sticky
compact

Actions:

scooping
pouring
filling
emptying
tipping
sifting
patting
digging
scraping
moulding

Quantity & Measure:

full/empty
more/less
heavy/light
nearly full
overflowing
half full
a little/a lot

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"What have you discovered?"
"How did you make it stay together?"
"What does this remind you of?"
"What could this become?"
"How could you improve your design?"

REMEMBER!

Comment first, question last.
Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting/questioning.

Avoid: "Are you making a sandcastle?"

Explore before you direct.
Value the process, not just the outcome.
Model rich vocabulary naturally.
Encourage prediction and problem-solving.
Follow the child's ideas

Water Play | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're investigating how the water moves."
"You're testing different tools."
"You're comparing what happens."

Describe:

"The water is flowing more quickly now."
"That container holds more water."
"You've changed the direction of the water."

Stretch:

"Why do you think that happened?"
"How could you slow the water down/speed up?"
"What could you change to make it work differently?"
"Which tool worked best? Why?"

Descriptive Vocabulary

Quantity & Measure:

full / empty
more / less
nearly full
overflowing
half full
a little / a lot
estimate
measure

Speed & Change:

fast
slow
steady
quick
sudden
gentle
speeding up
slowing down

Play inspiration

Creating channels and waterways.
Testing which objects float and sink.
Comparing the capacity of different containers.
Investigating how sponges, fabric and paper absorb water.
Building a challenge to move water from one place to another.

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"What have you discovered?"
"What made that happen?"
"What do you notice?"
"How could you test your idea?"
"What could you change?"
"What would happen if...?"

REMEMBER!

Comment before you question. Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting/questioning.

Avoid: "Be careful, don't spill it."

Explore before you direct.
Value investigation and curiosity.
Model rich scientific vocabulary.
Encourage prediction and reasoning.
Follow the child's ideas.

Reading Area | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're using the pictures to help you."

"You spotted a sound you know."

"You're blending the sounds together."

"You're reading with confidence."

Describe:

"You used your phonics to work out that word."

"You noticed that tricky word straight away."

"The illustrations helped you understand what was happening."

"You've read that with expression."

Stretch:

"How do you know that's what the character is feeling?"

"What do you think might happen next?"

"Does this remind you of another story?"

Developing Comprehension

"I wonder what..."

"This reminds me..."

"I noticed..."

"First... then..."

"What's the problem?"

"How could we solve it?"

"What makes you think that?"

Play inspiration

Retell stories with props.

Act out favourite scenes.

Create alternative endings.

Hunt for graphemes and tricky words.

Make simple story maps.

Find evidence in the illustrations.

Create speech bubbles for characters.

Take turns being the storyteller.

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"What helped you work that word out?"

"What clues did you notice?"

"Why do you think the character did that?"

"How do you know?"

REMEMBER!

Comment first, question last

Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting

Follow the child's lead

Follow the child's interests as well as the text.

Model blending and decoding naturally.

Use the illustrations to build meaning.

Celebrate understanding as much as accuracy.

Mark-making & Early Writing | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're experimenting with different kinds of marks."
"Those marks remind me of..."
"You've chosen to write some sounds."
"You're using lots of different lines and shapes."

Describe:

"Those zig-zag lines remind me of..."
"Those curved lines look like ..."
"Those tiny marks make me think..."
"You've added more detail to your message using sounds."

Stretch:

"Could you add another word to tell me more?"
"Can you read your writing back to me?"

Adult Modelling Talk

Describing lines:

wavy, zigzag, curved, straight, spiralling, dotted, broken, looping, swirling, jagged, tiny, chunky

Thinking like a Writer:

"I'm saying the word slowly... m-a-p... I can hear m first."
"I'll use my sound mat to help me."
"I think I need a finger space because this is a new word."
"I'll read it back to check it makes sense."
"I forgot a sound, I'll add it now."
"I'm going to tell a story about my marks."
"I'll use my sounds to help me write my message."

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"What would you like your writing to say?"
"Who is going to read your writing?"
"Which sounds can you hear?"
"Can you use your phonics to help you spell that word?"
"Can you read it back and see if it sounds right?"

REMEMBER!

Comment first, question last.
Pause 5-10 seconds after comments.

Avoid: "What is it?"

Follow the child's lead
Name techniques used.
Meaning often comes after the marks.

Value marks as much as writing.
Celebrate the journey from marks to words.

Home Corner | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're taking on a role."
"You're working together."
"You're planning what happens next."
"You're solving a problem together."

Describe:

"Your characters are working as a team."
"You're taking turns to share ideas."

Stretch:

"What needs to happen first?"
"Why did your character choose that?"
"How could you solve that problem?"
"What might happen next?"
"How is your character feeling?"
"What would your character say?"

Adult Modelling Talk Frames

Everyday Talk: Collaborate:

plan
organise
prepare
collect
choose
deliver
serve
help

share
listen
agree
decide
explain
suggest
cooperate
encourage

Play inspiration

Become a customer or visitor.
Take on a new character.
Introduce a simple problem to solve.
Help children organise jobs and roles.
Create shopping lists and menus.
Make appointments or take messages.

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"I wonder what happens next."
"Tell me about your plan."
"What made you decide that?"
"How could we solve this?"
"What does your character think?"
"This reminds me of..."

REMEMBER!

Comment first, question last. Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting/questioning.

Avoid taking over/directing play

Follow the child's lead.
Model rich everyday conversation.
Support children to solve problems together.

Develop the story through play.
Value any attempts at communication

Playdough | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're joining different pieces together."
"You're adding more detail."
"You're solving a problem."
"You're using the tools in different ways."

Describe:

"You've rolled the dough evenly."
"Those pieces fit together well."
"You're creating different textures and patterns."

Stretch:

"What could you add next?"
"How could you make it even stronger?"
"How could you improve it?"
"If someone else wanted to make this, what would you tell them?"

Descriptive Vocabulary for Playdough

Actions:

rolling
pressing
pinching
squeezing
flattening
stretching
twisting
cutting
stamping

Forms:

long
short
round
flat
thick
thin
curved
straight
coiled

Details & Changes:

joined, separated, layered,
overlapping, broken, reshaped

Texture & Feel:

soft, firm, smooth, bumpy,
sticky, squashy, crumbly

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"I noticed you..."
"That reminds me of..."
"I wonder what would happen if..."
"Tell me about..."
"How did you decide...?"
"What could you try next?"

REMEMBER!

Comment before you question.
Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting/questioning.
Follow the child's ideas.
Value exploration as much as finished models.
Model rich vocabulary through conversation.
Celebrate creativity, perseverance and problem solving.

Loose parts | Commentary (4-5 Years)

Sentence Starters

Notice:

"You're choosing those pieces for a reason."

"You're making a careful plan."

"You're comparing different objects."

"You're working together to build something."

Describe:

"You've created a repeating pattern."

"Your design is becoming more detailed."

"You've balanced those pieces carefully."

Stretch:

"Can you find another way to arrange them?"

"Why did you choose those objects?"

Descriptive Vocabulary

Shape:

large

small

long

short

wide

narrow

round

curved

flat

Position:

under

over

beside

between

around

inside

outside

near

far

Math

Language:

pattern

repeat

symmetrical

equal

group

compare

estimate

measure

Actions:

arrange

connect

balance

stack

line up

join

move

rotate

compare

Open-Ended Questions (Used Sparingly)

"I noticed..."

"This reminds me of..."

"Tell me about..."

"I wonder why..."

"How did you decide...?"

"What might happen if...?"

REMEMBER!

Comment before you question.

Pause 5-10 seconds after commenting/questioning.

Follow the child's ideas.

Value process over product.

Model mathematical language naturally.

Encourage children to explain and refine their thinking.

Celebrate creativity, collaboration and problem solving.