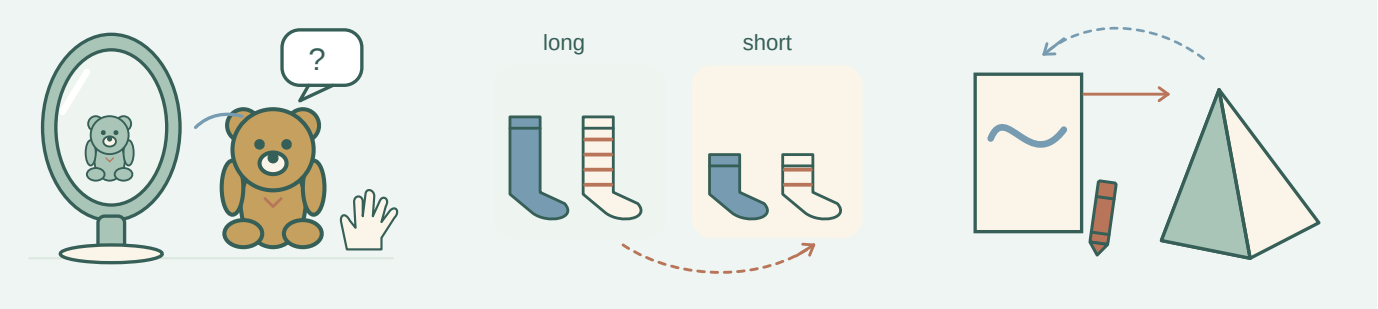
A Week of Preschool Play

7 invitations for home

A free sample from the finalized 365 Invitations to Play
By Dr. Michelle Peterson | Ages 3 to 5



Familiar materials. Room for your child to lead.

Start with the question and care guidance on the next two pages. Then choose an invitation, follow your child's ideas, and return to favorites whenever you like.

WHAT IS INSIDE

13 pages: seven complete invitation pages, a story example, question and care guidance, a theme finder, and this introduction and closing page.

The interior pages reproduce pages 7-17 of the finalized 429-page book. Original book page numbers are retained. Tap a title on the theme page or use the PDF bookmarks.

Leave room for an answer.

More questions are useful when they offer more ways into a conversation. Ask them sparingly enough that your child still has room to play.

NOTICE

Watch what has their attention before you speak.

COMMENT

Name something specific: 'The middle is bending.'

INVITE

Ask one question if it serves the child's idea.

WAIT

Give time for words, movement, a gesture, or no answer.

TO EXPLORE A MATERIAL

'What changed when you folded it?'

Then leave the paper in the child's hands.

TO UNDERSTAND THEIR THINKING

'What made you put those together?'

Watch the demonstration as closely as the explanation.

TO OPEN A POSSIBILITY

'What could our two characters try?'

Accept an unexpected answer and follow where it leads.

If your child looks stuck, make the invitation smaller: 'Shall Bear sit here or here?' If they are absorbed, let the silence continue. If they decline, accept the answer. An invitation includes a real choice about taking part.

Questions in this book are a menu. You never need to use all three.

Set the play up to fit.

These invitations are for families with children ages 3 to 5. Begin with the child in front of you: their interests, access needs, comfort, and ways of communicating.

01

Keep meaningful choices within reach

Use a low table, bring materials closer, or let your child direct your actions. Offer two visible choices when a broad question feels difficult. Ask before giving physical help.

02

Welcome different ways to communicate

Home languages, signs, gestures, pictures, and communication devices all belong here. Watching or moving one object can be a contribution. Eye contact and spoken answers are never requirements.

03

Make comfort part of the plan

A child can use a tool instead of touching, choose a quieter version, or leave a material alone. The support suggestion on each activity page offers one possible adjustment; it is not an age level.

04

Check the space and materials

Stay present. Choose sturdy, age-appropriate toys and art materials suited to your child's needs, including mouthing. Exclude small loose pieces, accessible batteries, sharp fasteners, cords, and fragile mirrors. Adults handle cutting and repairs.

05

Keep building and movement low

Use a clear, nonslip space and light materials. The boxes, homes, and bridges in this section are for toys. Keep cloths clear of faces and do not attach them around a neck.

06

Help the ending feel manageable

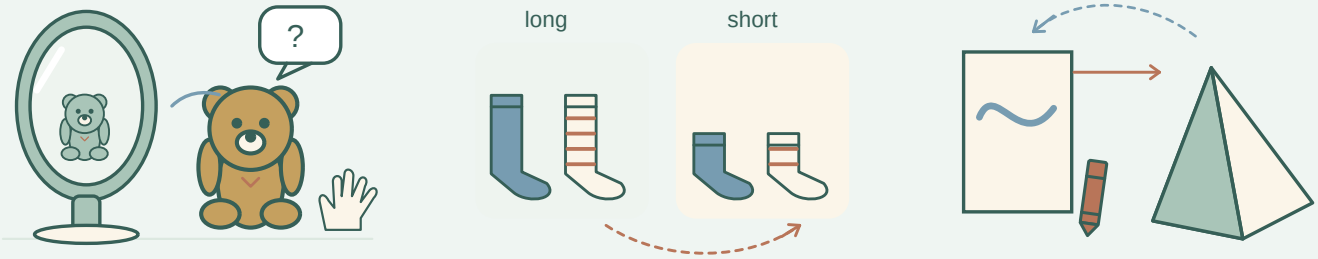
Give a gentle heads-up and name what can be saved. Offer a small part of cleanup or put the materials aside together. Pausing is a useful option when either partner is tired.

These are educational play ideas, not a developmental assessment or individualized therapy. Adapt them with the people who know your child when additional guidance is needed.

THEME 01 / INVITATIONS 001-007

Getting to know our play

Familiar things. Fresh possibilities.



Start with what already feels familiar: socks, paper, a favorite toy, and your attention. These invitations help you discover how your child likes to make choices, communicate an idea, and welcome a partner.

The adult's work in this section is to notice before adding. A sorting rule, an unexpected ending, or a quiet gesture can tell you where to join. Let the first visit teach you something about your child's play.

GATHER ACROSS THESE INVITATIONS

Child-safe mirror; two or three toys; four to six clean socks; paper and crayons; one low basket; large blocks or light boxes; short cloths if useful.

CHOOSE A BEGINNING

001 Mirror feelings

002 A tale of two toys

003 Sock detectives

004 Follow my moves

005 Paper possibilities

006 Toy home designers

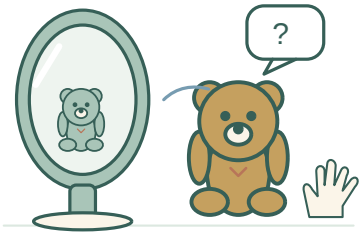
007 Together tower

A lens for this theme: What does my child choose when I leave the next step open?

INVITATION 001 / CONNECTION

Mirror feelings

A face can start a conversation. Your child's story gives it meaning.



GATHER A child-safe mirror and one familiar stuffed animal. No mirror? Use the toy and your voices.

MAKE A BEGINNING

Sit beside your child with the mirror within comfortable reach. Introduce the toy as a visitor who has something on its mind. Let your child decide whether the mirror belongs in the game.

LET THE PLAY UNFOLD

1. Make a gentle, curious expression and describe your own experience: 'I'm wondering where Bear will sit.' Invite your child to invent a look, a gesture, or a sound for Bear.
2. Build a small story around their idea. Perhaps Bear wants company, space, or a soft place to rest. Ask what happened in the story before deciding what Bear needs.
3. Try the child's comfort plan. Move Bear, offer a pretend drink, or sit quietly nearby. Let your child decide whether it helped or whether Bear wants something different.

QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

- ? What might have happened to Bear?
- ? How could we find out what Bear wants?
- ? Would the same thing help you, or would you choose something else?

WHY THIS PLAY MATTERS

Inventing a situation for Bear gives your child a reason to connect an event, a possible feeling, and a helpful response. A facial expression alone cannot tell us exactly how someone feels. Staying curious leaves room for more than one explanation.

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Your child changes the comfort plan after deciding Bear wants space. You can say, 'You listened to what Bear needed.'

MAKE ROOM TO JOIN

If copying faces is uncomfortable, let Bear communicate through a movement or a sound. Your child can direct you without looking in the mirror.

ANOTHER DAY

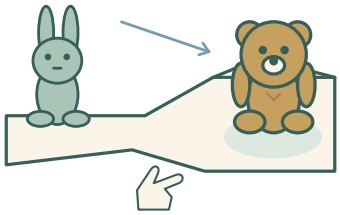
Tomorrow, give Bear a different situation: a noisy picnic or a new visitor. Explore how the same character might want a different kind of help.

CARE Use an unbreakable child-safe mirror. Avoid asking your child to perform a particular expression or make eye contact.

INVITATION 002 / STORY

A tale of two toys

Two familiar characters. One small surprise. An ending only your child could invent.



GATHER Two familiar toys; a folded paper can become a path, pond, bed, or doorway.

MAKE A BEGINNING

Let your child choose the characters and where they begin. Keep the space simple so the story, rather than a large collection of props, holds your attention.

LET THE PLAY UNFOLD

1. Offer one event: 'Rabbit is carrying a picnic.' Move Rabbit, then pause. Your child may add an action, a sound, a word, or a new idea with the second toy.
2. Respond to the idea they actually offered. If Bear sits on the path, Rabbit can notice Bear there. Leave space for your child to decide whether this is a meeting, a problem, or the end.
3. If the story needs a spark, introduce one small surprise: a pretend puddle or a missing picnic cup. Let the characters try something. Retell the child's ending using the toys.

QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

- ? Where are these two going?
- ? What could happen because of that?
- ? How would you like their adventure to end?

WHY THIS PLAY MATTERS

A shared story asks each partner to hold onto what just happened and add something that connects. Moving a toy gives the child a way to make an idea visible before they can explain it in a long sentence. The meaning matters more than story length.

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Bear brings a cup because Rabbit lost one. Notice the connection: 'You remembered what Rabbit needed.'

MAKE ROOM TO JOIN

If choosing a plot feels too open, offer two starts: a visit or a picnic. Your child can point, move a toy, or choose a different start entirely.

ANOTHER DAY

Keep the same beginning and invite a new ending another day. Compare what the characters did differently without choosing a best version.

CARE Use age-appropriate toys without loose small parts. The next page shows an invented example of following a child's story.

A CLOSER LOOK / INVITATION 002

Follow the story they offer.

An invented example of how an adult can add just enough.

01

A beginning

Adult moves Rabbit along the paper path.

"Rabbit is taking a picnic to the pond."

Offer one event. Pause before supplying the next one.

02

A contribution

Child puts Bear in the middle of the path.

"Bear is here. I wonder what Rabbit will do."

Treat the action as part of the story, even without spoken words.

03

A new connection

Child makes Bear carry the picnic.

"Bear is helping carry it. Now they can go together."

Expand the child's idea without replacing it with your own plot.

04

A chosen ending

Child puts both toys beside the paper pond.

"They found their picnic place. Shall we leave them here?"

Let the child decide whether this is an ending or another beginning.

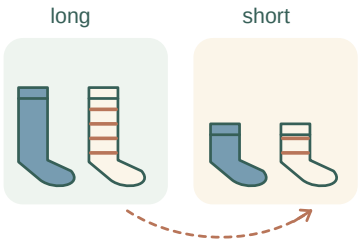
If the child changes direction

The pond can become a bed. Bear can leave. Follow the new idea and look for the next connection. The example above is a possibility, not a script to reproduce.

INVITATION 003 / INVESTIGATION

Sock detectives

The interesting part is the reason these socks belong together.



GATHER Four to six clean socks with noticeable differences in length, color, pattern, or texture.

MAKE A BEGINNING

Spread the socks where every one can be seen. Begin with an easy contrast, such as two long socks and two short socks. Add more only if the collection invites interest.

LET THE PLAY UNFOLD

1. Invite your child to put together any socks that seem to belong together. Wait to discover their rule. They may choose stripes, softness, a favorite color, or who wears them.
2. Place another sock nearby and wonder where it could go. A sock might fit more than one group. Let your child move it, create another group, or explain by showing.
3. When the first arrangement feels finished, ask permission to mix the socks. Try a new rule together. Notice which socks become neighbors and which move apart.

WHY THIS PLAY MATTERS

Grouping involves attending to a chosen feature while setting other features aside. Regrouping makes a useful idea visible: the objects can stay the same while the organizing rule changes. Your child's explanation reveals more than whether a pair matches your expectation.

WONDER TOGETHER

What made you put these together?

Where could this sock belong?

What other way could we arrange the same socks?

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

A striped sock moves from the 'long' group to the 'striped' group. Say, 'The sock stayed the same. Your plan changed.'

MAKE ROOM TO JOIN

Use just three socks and make one group together. If touching a texture is unwelcome, your child can direct your hands by pointing.

ANOTHER DAY

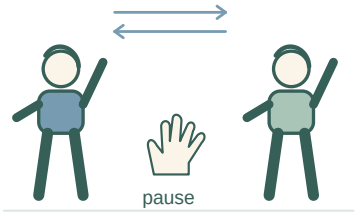
Create a pretend sock shop organized for a customer: warm socks, party socks, or socks for a giant. Discuss how the customer's needs change the arrangement.

CARE Remove clips, pins, or tags with sharp fasteners. This is an exploration of categories, not a timed matching test.

INVITATION 004 / MOVEMENT

Follow my moves

For a few playful moments, your child gets to set the pace.



GATHER A clear, nonslip space; a comfortable chair or tabletop if you want to play seated.

MAKE A BEGINNING

Choose positions where both partners can notice each other comfortably. Agree on a simple pause signal, such as an open hand or the word 'stop.' Practice it once together.

LET THE PLAY UNFOLD

1. Invite one small movement: a shoulder lift, finger wiggle, arm sweep, or gentle step. Copy what your child does at a pace that works for your own body.
2. Describe a change you notice: 'Your fingers are moving slowly now.' If the movement is difficult to copy, make a smaller version and let your child see how you adapted it.
3. Offer to swap leaders. Use one movement and a pause before trying a two-part sequence. End with your child's chosen resting shape, or let them use the pause signal to finish.

QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

- ? What move would you like me to follow?
- ? How can we make that work for both of us?
- ? What signal shall we use when we want a pause?

WHY THIS PLAY MATTERS

Following a moving partner involves noticing a cue and adjusting an action. Leading gives the child a chance to make an idea clear enough for someone else to follow. Swapping roles changes whose plan guides the play, without making speed or accuracy the point.

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Your child slows a movement so you can join. Name the adjustment: 'You gave me time to catch your idea.'

MAKE ROOM TO JOIN

Play with one hand, facial movements, or a toy your child directs. Partners can make different movements that share a rhythm or direction.

ANOTHER DAY

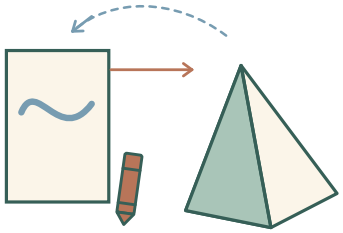
Choose a story image: moving through thick pretend mud or floating like a leaf. Notice how the same arm movement changes with the imagined setting.

CARE Keep movements comfortable and low. No balancing on furniture, forced stretches, or pressure to copy exactly.

INVITATION 005 / STUDIO

Paper possibilities

A flat sheet becomes a landscape, a sound, a shelter, or something without a name yet.



GATHER Two or three sheets of ordinary paper and chunky crayons. Optional: a large toy to join the scene.

MAKE A BEGINNING

Place the paper within reach with room to turn it. Avoid making a finished model to copy. You can explore your own sheet alongside your child's.

LET THE PLAY UNFOLD

1. Offer the paper without assigning an object: 'I wonder what you will try with this.' Notice whether your child draws, bends, folds, crumples, or simply feels it.
2. Describe the change rather than naming a finished product: 'That part stands up now.' Follow the meaning your child gives it. A folded ridge may become a mountain or remain an interesting shape.
3. Invite another material change if interest continues. Flatten a crumpled sheet, fold one edge, or add a mark. Let the child keep, undo, combine, or abandon the idea.

WHY THIS PLAY MATTERS

Paper gives immediate feedback: a bend creates an edge, a fold can hold a shape, and a crumple changes the surface. Your child can connect hand actions with visible changes while choosing what those changes mean. There is room to revise an idea without starting over.

WONDER TOGETHER

What changed when you did that?

How could you make this part stand or lie down?

What would you like to try with it next?

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

A sheet changes from a 'road' to a 'tent.' Say, 'You found another use for the shape you made.'

MAKE ROOM TO JOIN

Start a fold and let your child press it, or hold the paper steady at their request. Larger sheets may be easier to grasp.

ANOTHER DAY

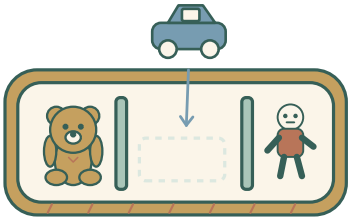
Return to yesterday's paper shape and let it become a setting for two toys. Its creases and marks can suggest a new story.

CARE Use child-appropriate crayons and keep paper out of mouths. Adults handle any cutting; scissors are unnecessary for this invitation.

INVITATION 006 / EVERYDAY

Toy home designers

Can a home be easy to find, easy to reach, and right for the toy that lives there?



GATHER Three familiar toys, one low basket, and a few large blocks or folded cloths to mark spaces.

MAKE A BEGINNING

Let your child choose a reachable place for the basket. Introduce a practical puzzle: the toys need resting places where they can be found again.

LET THE PLAY UNFOLD

1. Explore what each toy needs. A long vehicle may need a long space; a soft animal might curl up. Invite your child to arrange the toys before adding dividers or labels.
2. Play a short departure: one toy goes on an adventure. Ask your child to show it the way home. Try removing a second toy and see whether the arrangement still makes sense.
3. Become a visitor who needs help finding something. Let your child explain the system through pointing, a picture, or a demonstration. Change a space if the visitor cannot use it easily.

QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

- ? What kind of space does this toy need?
- ? How will we know where it goes?
- ? Could someone else find it using your plan?

WHY THIS PLAY MATTERS

A useful arrangement has to connect a plan with a real action: finding and returning an object. Testing it with another person makes clarity and access matter. The child's task is to design a system that works, rather than copy an adult's preferred tidy pattern.

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Your child moves a tall divider so a toy is easier to reach. Say, 'You changed the home so we can use it.'

MAKE ROOM TO JOIN

Give one toy a home first. A large picture or a visible outline can help your child recognize the place without reading a label.

ANOTHER DAY

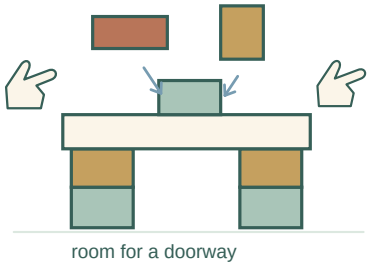
Use the arrangement during the next real cleanup. Notice together what works and choose one small repair if a space is confusing.

CARE Use low, stable storage and large dividers. Keep cloths short and clear of faces; do not attach cords or ties.

INVITATION 007 / COLLABORATION

Together tower

One tower gives two people a real reason to listen, negotiate, and try again.



GATHER Six to ten large blocks or light, sturdy boxes on a low, stable surface.

MAKE A BEGINNING

Place the pieces between you. Offer a shared starting point: 'What could we build together?' Ask how your child wants you to join before placing a block.

LET THE PLAY UNFOLD

1. Begin with a base your child chooses. Offer one genuine idea of your own: 'I would like a doorway.' Let the child respond before either partner adds more.
2. When ideas conflict, make both visible. Put two possible pieces side by side and name the choice: taller, wider, or room for a doorway. Try one plan with the option to return to the other.
3. If the tower falls, pause to notice the feeling before proposing a fix. When both partners want to continue, change one feature of the base or make a new kind of building.

QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

- ? Where would you like my piece to go?
- ? How could our two ideas fit together?
- ? What shall we keep or change if we build again?

WHY THIS PLAY MATTERS

Building together creates decisions that affect both partners. Asking before adding a piece turns cooperation into a concrete action. A falling tower can offer information about the structure, but rebuilding is useful only while the child still wants to participate.

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Your child saves a gap for your doorway. Say, 'You kept a place for my idea in your plan.'

MAKE ROOM TO JOIN

Build two nearby structures first, then add a connection if both builders want one. Joining the project need not mean sharing every piece.

ANOTHER DAY

Try a wider building that welcomes two toy visitors. Reuse the agreement you discovered today about asking before changing someone else's work.

CARE Keep structures low and use light pieces. Clear the landing space and keep faces away from falling blocks.

Keep the play going.

Small moments. Room for your child's ideas.

You have explored the first seven invitations from 365 Invitations to Play. Repeat a favorite, change the materials, or let your child suggest what happens next. There is no daily schedule to complete.

INSIDE THE FULL COLLECTION

429 pages. 365 invitations. 52 themes.

Each invitation includes a clear beginning, steps to explore, three optional questions, ideas for joining in, something to notice, and care guidance. The full collection includes 1,095 optional questions, linked contents, and PDF bookmarks.

Find **365 Invitations to Play** in the Spark Education shop where you downloaded this sample.

USING THIS SAMPLE

Read on a screen or print selected pages at Actual Size / 100% on US Letter paper. An adult supervises and adapts every invitation.

For one household or one educator and their enrolled classroom families. You may print or privately share this free sample with those families. Do not resell or publicly repost it. Educational information does not replace individualized advice or evaluation.

© 2026 Dr. Michelle Peterson | Spark Education.
Illustrations are custom scenes created with AI assistance and human art direction.

KEEP EVERYDAY PLAY GOING ALL YEAR

Loved this week? Explore all 365 ideas.



COMPLETE DIGITAL EDITION · INSTANT PDF DOWNLOAD ($14.95)

365 Invitations to Play — $14.95

Open 365 everyday preschool play invitations across 52 themes (429 illustrated pages) using materials already in your home—with guidance on how to begin and what your child is exploring.

Get the complete edition ($14.95) – instant PDF download

Or preview more sample pages at https://sparkacademymorton.com/365-invitations-to-play/

BEST FAMILY VALUE · SAVE $23.80

Preschool Play & Readiness Complete 5-Book Collection — $24.95

Includes all five Spark Education guides together ($48.75 separately): What Really Matters Before the First Day (71 pp.), The Printable Toolkit (41 pp.), Preschool Parenting Scripts (20 pp.), 365 Invitations to Play (429 pp.), and Spark on the Go (44 pp.).

Get all 5 resources ($24.95) at sparkacademymorton.com/parent-resources/

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Michelle Peterson, Ed.D., is an early childhood researcher, former school leader with four Illinois teaching certifications including Superintendent, and founder of Spark Academy in Morton, Illinois. Every Spark Education guide is built for real family life—warm, practical, and free of busywork.

Free sample edition for personal family preview. © 2026 Dr. Michelle Peterson · Spark Education.