

# WISDOM WONDER PROJECT™

Preschool Block Play  
Collection

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***September***

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**We make the power, magic,  
and mystery of learning  
accessible to our modern world.**



Childhood is a magical time full of wonder and discovery. My own childhood memories are filled with long hours playing and exploring outside in the dirt. Whether it was riding our baby blue Schwinn bicycles or concocting various recipes using dirt and water, my sister and I kept busy. Staying out all day until it was dark was our norm. When I did play inside, it was with my wood animals and blocks. Hours were spent getting lost in another world of zoos and habitats for my animals. The simplicity of these toys cultivated a life of creativity and wonder. When I had my children, I was grateful my mother saved those blocks because they helped lay the foundation for discovery and play within my own home.

Several years ago, our school expanded to include a preschool program. We were excited about this new adventure and wanted to prepare ourselves well, so off we headed to a conference for some inspiration. It was there that one of our teachers attended a workshop on incorporating block play in the classroom. We knew enough from our own childhood and parenting that blocks were important, and therefore had several bins of blocks in the classroom, but our eyes were opened to how much more we could be doing with them. Hungry for even more learning, we got our hands on a copy of *Learning Through Play: Blocks* by Ellen Booth Church. She helped us see the importance of preparing our block play space, so that first year we started small by organizing a space for the blocks. This meant giving up some space to make room, but we were excited to see how this was going to impact our students' learning. We had no idea what to expect and were blown away by our students' cognitive and social development. What an exciting time it was! Every day, the children were making discoveries, and we were learning right along with them.

Recognizing there was still so much more to learn, we spent the next year reading through *Creative Block Play: A Comprehensive Guide to Learning Through Building* by Roseanna Hansel and put into practice many of her suggestions. We added more blocks, loose parts, and clipboards for the children to record on and we connected blocks to our literature study. We frequently met as a staff to discuss what was happening in our classrooms, looking for ways



## Merideth Eades

Merideth is one of the founders of SLO Classical Academy's Little Wonders, the first classical preschool in our area. Holding a B.A. in Human Development from California Polytechnic State University, she's coming up on 12 years of working with SLOCA, and before that she worked one on one teaching kiddos how to read. She dreams of writing her own children's book one day, but, for now, is content to be opened to wonder every day by the wonder-full children around her. "It isn't complicated," she says. "Just look around with the expectation that you will be wowed."



to bring clarity to what we were practicing and to deepen our students' learning. It wasn't until this year when I picked up a copy of Mary Jo Pullman's book, *Blocks and Beyond*, that I began making the connection with blocks and spatial development in children and how this positively impacts their mathematical understanding in the later years. The idea that I could increase children's spatial reasoning through play was thrilling. It is my hope that through this collection, you will experience that same thrill, all the while growing as an educator.

Always Learning,  
Merideth Eades



# ***EQUIPPING YOU: a message to the educator***



## **Flow and Scheduling**

The Wisdom Wonder Project Preschool Block Play Collection was created to give home and classroom educators a feast of ideas and activities that directly correlate to one rich and beautiful picture book each month. It is intended to encourage a deep, engaging, and slow rhythm to your weeks and months as you journey through the preschool years alongside your child. There is not one schedule or one right way to go about each month. This collection is about creating a love of learning math through playing with blocks. It is meant to walk you slowly through each month—not to overwhelm or cause you to rush to check the boxes. It is intended to create time for you and your child to spend together, enjoying the process, and learning. You may want to do all of the activities, you may want to do fewer, or you may even want to add more! Repeat these activities as much as possible; you have our permission. Repetition has tremendous value in learning. Enjoy the feast however you see best.



## **Finding Success in the Journey**

1. Read through the monthly unit.
2. Create your vision for teaching the collection to your child.
3. Look at your calendar and plan out your weeks.
4. Gather the necessary materials.
5. Read the picture book yourself.
6. Engage in the feast of activities and ideas.
7. Enjoy these tiring, but fleeting, preschool years.



## Sample Schedule

	DAY 01	DAY 02	DAY 03	DAY 04	DAY 05
WEEK 01	Read and Discuss the Book		Mapping Activity		Read and Discuss the Book, Building Activity
WEEK 02		Read and Discuss the Book, Mapping Activity		Puzzles & Shapes Activity	
WEEK 03	Building Activity		Extension Activity		Puzzles & Shapes Activity
WEEK 04		Extension Activity		Extension Activity	

This schedule is meant to serve as a guide. Please feel free to make adjustments as you see fit. You will notice three days are devoted to reading and enjoying the book. For some of you, this may feel redundant and unnecessary, but, in our experience, children will often make new discoveries after the second and third reading of a book.



## The *Why* Behind the Collection

Learning through play has been the driving force behind most of what I do with children in the classroom. One of my goals in this collection is to share what I have learned through my research on how block play increases spatial development in young children. Spatial development is defined as the ability to problem-solve operations, such as thinking about objects in space, viewing things from a different perspective, coordinating use of space, representation, and reasoning. Spatial thinking is a critical element of education and teaching because it lays the foundation for learning science and mathematics throughout the school years.

*Children learn through play. Most importantly, in play, children learn how to learn.*

FRED  
DONALDSON

The key to young children developing spatial awareness is getting a variety of materials into their hands and allowing or encouraging them to explore and create. Some of the suggested activities are "open-ended" for the sole purpose of creating the space to sit with your child, observing and asking them questions. Encourage them without stepping in too quickly to "fix it" for them. Sometimes, all they need is the time to process, so sitting back and giving them the space to work through their frustrations will often result in them figuring it out for themselves. This simple act of being still and waiting will empower them in future learning situations. It is my hope that by giving you this permission to slow down and be present, it will open the door to wonder.



## Getting Started

Before beginning the activities in this collection, we suggest you first start by familiarizing yourself with the blocks and creating a plan for your space. We have found that dedicating a place in your house or classroom for blocks will ensure greater success for you and your child. Ideally, choose a spot that will allow you some flexibility to keep whatever creation your child is working on out over a period of days. The following steps are encouraged to be done with your child and serve as another valuable learning opportunity, as well as give you that special focused time that is so important in relationship building. We suggest taking 3–5 days to repeat these steps and build familiarity with the materials before proceeding. What a beautiful thing it is to create the space to connect with our children!

Start off by dumping the blocks into a pile on the floor. Sit with your child and explain that before you start to use them, you're going to talk about them. Ask your child what they notice about the blocks. Are they all the same? How are they the same? How are they different? Next, tell your child that you will be sorting them into groups according to shapes. Have your child choose which shape to start with. Continue until all the shapes have been sorted and then move on to the next activity.

Organizing the blocks. The idea is that these blocks should be easily accessible to your child. Walk around your home and find a place where you want to store the blocks. It's best that they're not put into a basket but sorted out on a shelf. The bottom of a bookshelf works great. If you have space constraints, then a basket is fine. You will want to make sure you have the space to dump them out and, potentially, leave them out for a few days. This is a place you should plan to come back to every day.

Naming and labeling the blocks. There are many reasons to take the time to label the blocks. First, it provides an opportunity to expose your child to early literacy. It also provides another opportunity for them to develop their spatial awareness skills by matching the block shapes to the picture when they are putting them away. Ideally this activity should be done after the sorting and organizing activity. If you need to step away and come back another day, just keep in mind you will need to have the blocks out to name and label them.

To label the blocks for a very young child, a photograph of the block, glued onto a piece of cardstock with the name written or typed at the bottom, works beautifully. Laminating the cardstock will ensure they



last longer. For older children, you can have them trace the shapes onto paper, cut them out, and glue them on cardstock. Type or write out the name of the block and add it to the bottom of the paper they traced the shape on. Then, tape the cardstock and name on the shelf in front of the corresponding shape.



## Book of the Month

The Book of the Month is a beautiful picture book that the activities will relate to. These have been selected from a long list of beloved books with the goal of bringing the beauty and wonder of the written word to life.



## Book Overview

Each month, you will see a book overview. The purpose of this section is to support you in how to introduce the book to your child by giving you a brief introduction. This is meant to be a springboard for further discussion while you read. Invite your child to look at the pictures and tell you what they notice. You will be amazed at what they point out. Resist the urge to ask questions that require yes or no answers. Aim for a more open-ended approach.



## Vocabulary

Each month, you will find a list of words to promote direction, positional words to show where something is located, and/or topological concepts. The idea is to expose them early so that, at some point, these words will become a part of their language store.





## Mapping

The lessons in this section will be geared toward broadening the child's understanding of the world directly in front of them, e.g., home, neighborhood, and community. In this section, you will find suggested activities to promote mapping skills. Mapping skills, or learning routes, are important because they help children orient themselves in space. Combining the use of teaching both verbal directions and landmarks will greatly increase your child's spatial understanding. Children learn first from their home and immediate surroundings, then school, community, neighborhood, state, country, and finally, the world.



## Building

In this section, you will find a variety of activities incorporating the different stages of block play. The stages of block play are Carrying, Building, Bridging, Enclosing, Making Decorative Patterns, Naming, and Symbolizing (Johnson, 1966). In these units, a wide variety of blocks and other manipulatives will be suggested as tools to help your child develop geometric form and spatial development. Knowing and understanding the different stages of block play will help as you guide your child through the activities.



## Puzzles & Shapes

In this section, children will be touching, manipulating, drawing, and representing shapes in a variety of ways, as well as working through puzzles. These activities will help them develop the spatial reasoning skills needed later in Geometry. Puzzle-play encourages the development of mental transformation, matching shapes, and problem-solving.



## Extension Activities

The activities found in this section are designed to enhance the learning experience by suggesting additional activities that delve deeper into the concepts. You might find art and sensory play or games and early literacy.



# Materials

All materials are meant to enhance your child's learning experience. Many can be found around the house, while some will need to be purchased. Our goal is to find affordable options for products that can last a lifetime. Links are included for your convenience, but you're welcome to get creative and substitute what you have on hand or find similar options as you see fit.

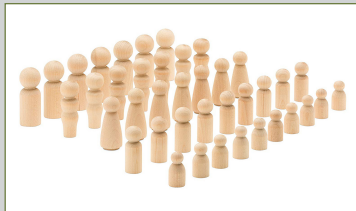
At the end of each unit, you will find a shopping list that contains all materials needed for that month. The materials on that list are pulled from three categories:

- 1. Setting Up Your Space**– These are foundational materials you will need for schooling your child(ren) at this age. You should already have most of these items handy. Use the hyperlink to view the full recommended list on our Little by Little blog.
- 2. Collection Materials**– Some materials will be used in most of the months throughout this particular collection. Some are required, others are just recommended. Before you begin your first month in this collection, plan on purchasing the materials listed below:

*Required:*



[Jumbo Cardboard Blocks](#)



[Wooden Peg People](#)

*Recommended:*

[\*Blocks and Beyond: Strengthening Early Math and Science Skills Through Spatial Learning\* by Mary Jo Pollman](#)  
[\*Creative Block Play: A Comprehensive Guide to Learning Through Building\* by Roseanna Hansel](#)  
[\*Learning Through Play: Blocks\* by Ellen Booth Church](#)

- 3. Monthly Materials**– There are also required materials specific to each month. You will find these materials pictured, linked, or listed in the monthly unit. Plan on purchasing these materials before you begin your new lessons.



## Recommended Products

Each month, you can expect to find an array of carefully selected items that we believe will enhance your child's learning experience. Our goal is to find products that will last a lifetime, while also keeping affordability in mind. However, we do also include items that are just simply wonderful for children's development but are more expensive. Links for items will be included for your convenience. Happy shopping!



## Recommended Books

Here, you will find suggested picture books to read to your child that correlate with the monthly focus. These books are meant to be used as a springboard for learning and to enrich your time together. Reading books with your child is a collaborative experience with you and your child sitting side by side, possibly snuggled up on the couch or bed, while pouring over the pages together. Whenever I start a new activity with my children, I like to begin with reading a book. It quiets us and prepares us for our time together.

# Preschool Block Play

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***September***

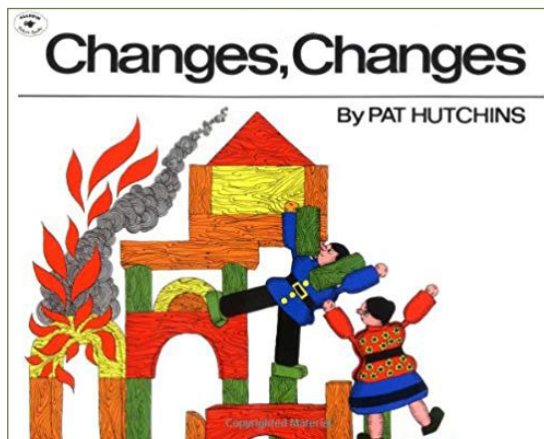
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# Changes, Changes

By Pat Hutchins



*"The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct." – CARL JUNG*



## Book Overview

The main characters are a happy little wooden couple who live in a house made from blocks, until one day their house catches fire. Turn the pages to find out what they do after that.

As you sit down to read this book, explain that this is a wordless picture book. This means the pictures are telling the story. Start by asking your child: "What could the characters be saying to each other? Where does the story take place? Are they going anywhere? What do you notice on each page? Pay attention to the characters. How are they feeling? How do you know?" Resist the urge to move too quickly through the reading of this book. Savor it with your child, allowing them to bring the story alive through their words.



## Vocabulary

Directional words: *over, under, on top, left, right, above, below, beside, inside, and next to.*



## Mapping

**Activity 01—Make a City.** The materials you will need for this activity are your blocks, a blue play scarf, and the wooden peg people. Tell your child that they get to build a city. Start your discussion by asking your child to tell you what makes a city. If they are unsure of how to tell you, then guide the discussion by telling them a city is made up of buildings and that sometimes those buildings are different heights. Some cities have buildings that are several stories or levels high. However, some cities are more like towns with less building and where the buildings are not as tall. Most cities have places for people to live. Sometimes, those places are houses, apartments, or even apartments over stores. Continue to explain that some cities have a lot of water and trees while others do not have as many. You can also ask guiding questions, such as "Are cities made up of building? Are the buildings all the same height?" Ask them to describe the city where they live.

Once you are satisfied that your child understands what a city is, introduce the materials. Tell them they can use the blue scarf to act as water that connects two different structures. Perhaps your child builds a house or structure for themselves and the house of a friend or a shop they would like to visit. Have them pretend this friend or shop is across the river or stream. They could build a boat to use for travel to get there. Add as many different places as your child would like. Using this month's directional vocabulary, help your child dictate a story about traveling to see their various friends and the places in the city. When they are finished building, ask them to stand on a chair to get a "birds-eye" view of the city they have created. Take a picture from that view and use it for the next activity.

**Activity 02—City Map.** You will need the photograph from the first mapping activity, masking or painter's tape, a piece of paper, and a pen or pencil. Using the photograph, tell your child that today they will be drawing a picture of the city they made earlier, but drawing it from a bird's eye view, like they did when they stood on the chair. This picture is a map and will act as a map for anyone who would like to 'visit' your city. Print the photograph you took, if you haven't already. Lay the photo on



a table or the floor. Using the masking tape, tape a regular piece of printer paper or cardstock to the floor or table by the photo. Label the four pieces of masking tape on each item: top, right side, left side, and bottom. This will help your child with the orientation of the photo and the map, and it will give you an opportunity to use those directional words.

Find a spot to start (top, bottom, or a side) on the photograph. Have your child point to a building on the photo and tell you what shapes they used to make that building. Hopefully not too much time has passed, so they should remember what blocks they used. Since this is the first attempt at making a map, keep your expectations simple. If all they are able to draw is one shape for each building, then great! You want to focus on the experience of working on this map together. You might also want to consider “sharing the pen” by having your child tell you what to draw. Remember to keep the conversation going by asking your child questions about the shapes and the placement of their structures using the directional vocabulary. Have them draw (or share the pen) for as many of the buildings in the photo as is a good amount for your child. Whatever their product ends up looking like, the process is something to celebrate.



## Building

**Activity 01—Build a House.** For this activity you will need your blocks. Sitting with your child, tell them they are going to use the blocks to build a house. Ask them which blocks they need to build a house. After they gather the blocks they need, find a spot on the floor and start building. Depending on your child’s experience with blocks, you may need to show them how to bridge blocks. This is when you connect two blocks with a third to form a roof or bridge. Can they stack and bridge their blocks like the pictures in the book? While they are building ask them, “Who is going to live in their house? How many rooms will their house have? Will their house have more than one level?” Keep dialoguing with your child, asking questions as they build. Leave it out overnight to see if your child decides to change it the next day.

**Activity 02—Creative Building.** You will need your blocks again for this activity. Ask your child, what other things can they make out of blocks? A car? A truck? A boat? A helicopter? Once they decide, talk about what they need to include. If they decide to make a helicopter, then, they would need a propellor. How will they make that? What about wheels for a car? Try to spur their process, but not to give too much input during this step. Children have a wonderful ability to express themselves creatively.





## Puzzles & Shapes

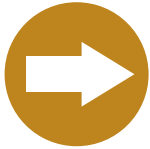
**Activity 01—Fun with Shapes.** You will need playdough and your blocks for this activity. Make playdough with your child using the playdough recipe at the end of the document. When it is ready, have your child press the blocks into the playdough to make impressions. Talk about what shape each block makes. Discuss the concepts of two-dimensional as opposed to three-dimensional. The shape print in the playdough is two-dimensional, and the block is three-dimensional. Explore these ideas with various shapes. See if they notice any surprises. Do all the sides of all the blocks make the same shape? Count the different sides of the various shapes. How many does a triangle, square, rectangle have? How many corners?

**Activity 02—Make a Shape.** For this activity, gather your blocks. You are going to guide your child to find what blocks fits within the shape of another block. Set out a square block. Ask them what blocks will fit in that to make a square. Have them try out the different answers they give to see if it works. They will end up at two triangles, and maybe other solutions depending on what block sets you have. Continue this shape making for all other blocks you have that can function in this manner.



## Extension Activities

**Activity 01—Peg People Painting.** The materials you will need for this activity are the wooden peg people, tempera paint, paintbrushes, a paint palette or paper plate, a vinyl tablecloth, a small jar for water, and a Sharpie marker. Tell your child that they will be painting the peg people to use when playing with their blocks. As they are sitting with you, have them hold and examine a couple of the peg people. Talk about how they feel and what they look like. Ask them what they could do to turn them into people or animals for their block play. Invite your child to come to the table where you have set up the paints, brushes, and water on top of the protective vinyl tablecloth. They will use the Sharpie later to add the details on the face. Ask your child to choose one peg person to begin with. Ask them to paint the body of the doll first, making sure to leave the head bare. They'll paint that later. While the paint is drying on that doll, pass out another one, and have them paint the body only. Repeat with a couple more dolls, and then go back to the first to add hair on half of the head. Tell them if they want to add a separate color for a shirt they can paint over the other color once it's dry. When all the



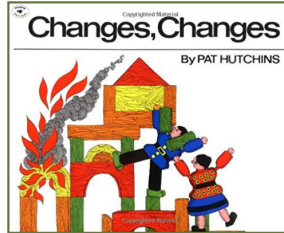
paint is dry, or when your child can hold the peg person, invite them to use the Sharpie to add the eyes, nose, and mouth. Once the dolls are dry, bring them to your block area to play with.

**Activity 02—Shape Book.** For this activity you will need a camera to take photos, a printer to print them, paper for the printer, items around the house to photograph, a pen, and staples or a folder for the book. Look for things around the house that have shapes, e.g., cans, cereal boxes, books, etc. Take pictures of the shapes together, print them, and make a shape book. On each page (printed photo), use the sentence starter: "I see a (circle, square, cone, triangle, cylinder, sphere)." Have your child dictate the name of the shape to you. (Or if they are ready, have them write it.) You can simply staple the pages together or get a little fancier by putting them in a folder or small binder. Share the book with a friend or family member. Read and enjoy the book together. Your child can even learn to "read" the book themselves since they will easily memorize it.

**Activity 03—How High Can You Build It?** The materials you need for this activity are your colorful wooden blocks and our book of the month. Have your child gather their colorful blocks and bring them to a table or the floor, but you want a stable surface to work on. Take out the book *Changes, Changes* and flip through the pages, pointing out the various heights of the structures to your child. Tell your child that they will practice building a tall tower, as high as they can build, until it falls. It can be disappointing for children when towers fall, but letting them know up front that we are expecting them to fall will help them not be disappointed. Have them experiment with different foundations. Ask them to try building with a small block on the bottom and then work your way up to a large stable foundation. How high can they build the tower? What happens if they build starting with a large block? How high can they build then? Have your child build a few more with different bases before joining in to see who can build the tallest tower. After that, you can try building one together, each taking turns adding a block. How high can you get it together before it falls? Ask your child what they noticed about the different towers?



## Materials



Changes, Changes



Play Scarves or Blue Fabric

Playdough Ingredients,  
recipe at end of document  
Wooden Peg People  
Vinyl Tablecloth  
Staples or Folder  
Masking/Painter's Tape  
Camera (phone is fine)  
Pen  
Sharpie Marker

White Printer Paper  
Printer, or place to print  
Small Jar for Water  
Paper Plate or Paint Palette  
Paintbrushes  
Tempera Paints  
Colorful Unit Blocks  
Standard Unit Blocks



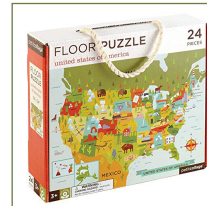
## Recommended Products



Kids Carpet City Life  
Playmat



Starter Puzzle



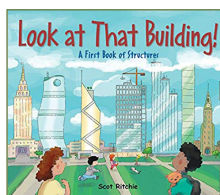
U.S. Puzzle



Firetruck Puzzle



## Recommended Books





# No Cook PLAYDOUGH Recipe

2 cups flour  
½ cup salt  
2 T cream of tartar  
2 T oil (coconut or vegetable)  
1- 1 ½ cups water  
Food coloring

Combine flour, salt, and cream of tartar into a bowl. Add oil. Boil the water in the microwave. Add food coloring to the water and pour into the bowl with the dry ingredients. You may need to add some more flour to get your desired consistency. Enjoy!

# Expressions of Gratitude

Thank you to my friend and colleague, Susie, who has steadfastly stood by giving me words of encouragement, a listening ear, and grace as I embarked on this journey.

Thank you to the Little Wonders staff who I have had the privilege to learn and grow with. It's never a dull moment, and my life is richer having you all in it.

Thank you to my family who has patiently endured the piles of books and notes while writing this.

## References

*Blocks and Beyond* by Mary Jo Pullman