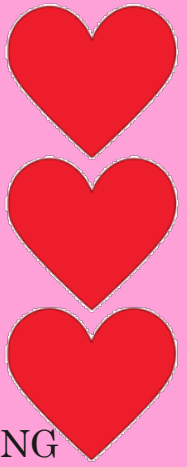




# EARLY LEARNING PARENTS' PAGES



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THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING

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## February is Children's Dental Health Month



Some parents think that baby teeth are not important because children lose their baby teeth. Research has shown that healthy baby teeth lead to healthy permanent teeth. The American Dental Association reminds us that [healthy teeth begin at birth](#).

Taking care of your child's future teeth begins at birth and prevents tooth decay. Whether your infant nurses or drinks from a bottle, cleaning their gums with a soft clean cloth helps them develop healthy baby teeth. When their first tooth starts to show, use a soft baby toothbrush on the tooth with a small amount of fluoride toothpaste and continue to clean their gums. Just as you schedule well-visit appointments with health care professionals, schedule yearly dental appointments for your child as soon as they get their first tooth. Your child needs strong, healthy teeth to chew their food and speak correctly. Their baby teeth also help make sure their permanent teeth align correctly.

Your child's dental health has an overall effect on their health and well-being. [Oral health has a big impact on school readiness](#). For your child to be ready to learn, they must be healthy. Oral health affects your child's physical, social and emotional development as well as their ability to learn. Research has shown that children with poor oral health may:

- Have a hard time concentrating because they experience pain.
- Be frequently absent from school.
- Suffer from frequent infections and develop other health issues.
- Cover their mouths when speaking or interacting with others.



Learn more about promoting [healthy smiles](#).

### Give Kids A Smile®

The American Dental Association's Give Kids A Smile (GKAS) program is one of the world's largest oral health charitable programs. Launched nationally in 2003, GKAS is an access-to-care program designed to encourage parents, health professionals and policy makers to address the year-round need for oral health care and education for all children. Each year, the GKAS program supports approximately 10,000 dentists, 30,000 dental team members and other community volunteers in providing free oral healthcare services to more than 350,000 children from low-income families across the country. To find out more about GKAS, visit [www.ada.org/GKAS](http://www.ada.org/GKAS).

## Black History Month

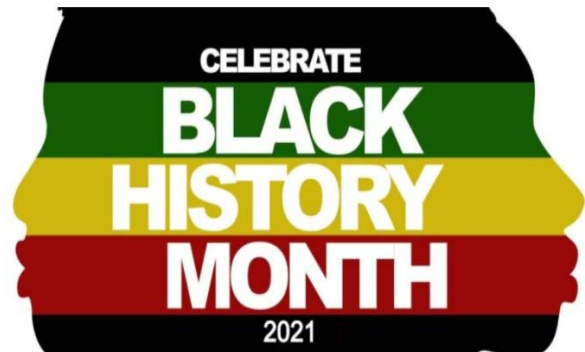
February is Black History Month. It is a time to share with your child the contributions that African Americans made in the past and continue to make in our country and local communities. Many schools and child care programs share the work and achievements of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other well-known African American leaders with their students. Did you know that many African Americans became business owners, inventors, scientists and educators starting in the 1800s? Ask your child's teacher to send home the information the children are learning about African American history so you can discuss contributions African Americans have made to society, education, science, art, law and medicine. This month, help your child learn about contributions of African Americans both past and present.



Introduce your child to African Americans in your community who have made a difference in the lives of others. Maybe a local African American volunteer, educator, doctor, lawyer, minister, baker, business owner, inventor or builder helped or influenced you in the past. Tell your child about this special person and take your child to meet them if possible or look to see if there is information available on the internet or local newspaper that you can share.

Your young child may have a better understanding of African American history through listening to stories about African Americans. Storybooks are a fun and easy way for your child to experience the history of African Americans in our country or learn about their role in history. Children's book author Cheryl Hudson has suggestions for using books with children to help them understand Black History Month.

- Visit the library to find children's books written by African American authors and illustrators. As you read these books together, relate the stories to your child's own experiences.
- Find books that are inclusive and represent your community. Books about everyday life with diverse characters help your child see that people are the same even though they may look different.
- Answer your child's questions about characters in the books. Tell them that all children are important and valued no matter how they look.
- Find books about contemporary life for your child. It is educational for them to see the ongoing contributions of African Americans.
- You can find wonderful books on the list of [Coretta Scott King Award Winners](#) as well.

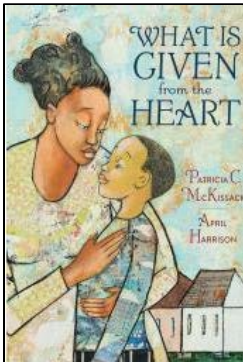


There are many notable African Americans who have contributed so much to our country's heritage and history. Read your child *The Story of President Barack Obama* from the National Geographic Kids' books and talk about the first African American to become president of our country. Talk to your child about the new vice-president, she is also the first African American and first Asian American vice-president of the United States. Ask the local librarian to help you find stories about African Americans to share with your child throughout the year.

February 17<sup>th</sup> is Random Acts of Kindness Day. Take the challenge with your child to “Make Kindness the Norm” in your [home and neighborhood](#).

Share a photo or story of your family on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) using #MakeKindnessTheNorm

make  
kindness  
the norm.



*What Is Given from the Heart*, by the late Patricia C. McKissack and illustrated by April Harrison, is the last offering from this legendary author, who passed away in 2017.



Author-illustrator Oge Mora's *Thank You, Omu!* won a 2019 Caldecott Honor. It's the story of how a woman named Omu makes a delicious stew that attracts members of her community to her door and she feeds them all. Children will be exposed to African American and Nigerian cultural traditions of sharing food and friendship, as well as messages of kindness, gratitude and community.

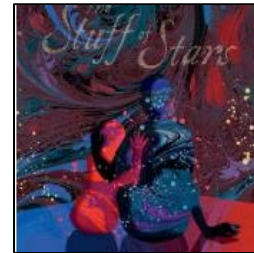
Books to

Celebrate

Black

History

Month



Parents need to know that *The Stuff of Stars* is by two talented multi-award winners, Newbery Honoree [Marion Dane Bauer](#) and Caldecott Honoree [Ekuia Holmes](#). The book was named a [2019 Coretta Scott King Honor Book](#).



*Saturday* is author-illustrator Oge Mora's highly anticipated follow up to *Thank You, Omu!*, which won a 2019 Caldecott Honor. This book, featuring Mora's characteristic saturated color collages, is about Eva and her mother and their nearly ruined Saturday together. Children will learn about a calming practice the two characters use when they face disappointment, anger or frustration. And it's full of positive messages about supporting each other.

## Dual Language Learners

In 2013, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that [20 percent of children](#) under the age of 5 lived in households in which no one over the age of 13 spoke English as their first language. Results of the 2020 census are expected in the Spring.

If your family speaks a language other than English at home, you may have concerns about your child's language development.

Parents of dual language learners often ask:

- Is it possible to teach your child to be bilingual at an early age or should you teach your child words in one language?
- Should you use only your home language at home or use English as well as your home language?
- What type of child care or early learning programs are best for my child?



[Language experts](#) remind parents that the most important ways children learn language are through exposure and need. When children are exposed from birth to a language in different ways with many different people, they will learn to use that language to interact with people around them. If young children are exposed from birth to two languages in a variety of settings with different people, they will learn to use both languages.

[Research](#) supports using both languages when teaching your child new words. Initially, introducing words in your home language and later attaching an English word causes less confusion. As your child learns more words in both languages, they may get the words confused or use them interchangeably. That is okay. Allow your child to use both languages as they are learning new words. Your conversations with your child will reinforce the correct choice of words and the appropriate use of each language.



If your child will attend a [preschool or child care](#), look for a child care provider or [preschool that supports dual language learners](#). Being exposed to both languages at home and at school helps your child to learn to communicate better in both languages. It is important to let your [child's teacher](#) or caregiver know who speaks which language in your home and when each language is used. If your child suddenly stops using one language or seems confused about which language to use at home or at school, alert your child's teacher. Ask the teacher or the local librarian to help you find [children's books in your home language](#) and in English. Reading both versions of a book will support your child's language development in both languages.

If you are learning English, practice using English at home with your child. Play a game where your child searches for items in your home. When you say, "Where is the red ball" in English, your child answers in your home language. Vary the game by asking questions in your home language and have your child answer in English.

### Additional Resources

Raising Bilingual Children: <http://bit.ly/RaisingBilingualChildrenResource>

Welcoming and Supporting Dual Language Learners: <http://bit.ly/NAEYCDualLanguage>

Interactive Read-Alouds Support Oral Language Development: <http://bit.ly/ReadAloudOralDevelopment>

## A Parent's Perspective on the Importance of Dual Languages

### La Perspectiva de los Padres sobre la Importancia de los Idiomas Duales

To learn more about speaking Spanish at home visit: <http://bit.ly/AtHomeSpanish>

#### In English

Although many immigrant families hold onto traditions and family celebrations, many forget the most important tradition of them all. It is the gift of their ancestor's language. As a parent, I have experienced years of transitions our family has made since coming to the United States. Most immigrant families initially share their native food and continue to use their country's native language, but over time, just as they learn to accept new American culinary dishes, they accept English as their primary language. They learn to read, write and speak English. As children are born into their families, they send them to school to become fluent English speakers and writers.

Over time, their children become translators and interpreters for their parents. The parents become better at understanding English. I have noticed that these parents understand English and continue to speak Spanish to their children, but in many migrant families, their children will only respond to their parents in English.

This cycle creates concern. When those children grow and become parents, they speak English to their children. Their children come to use English as their primary language leaving their native language as a thing of the past. Future generations will come to lose decades of traditions and their knowledge of their family's language in a few years.

My family's primary language, Spanish, is one of many languages that is being lost by immigrant families over time. As families lose their ability to understand their ancestors' primary language, many traditions are also lost. Encouraging families to share and cultivate their traditions and to continue to teach their children their ancestors' primary language helps children understand their heritage and appreciate their ancestors. It helps children maintain a sense of self and helps them understand the importance of their family's heritage.

#### En Español

Aunque muchas familias inmigrantes se aferran a las tradiciones y celebraciones familiares, muchas olvidan la tradición más importante de todas. Es el regalo del idioma de sus antepasados. Como un padre, he experimentado años de transiciones que nuestra familia ha hecho desde que llegó a los Estados Unidos. La mayoría de las familias inmigrante inicialmente comparten su comida nativa y continúan usando el idioma nativo de su país, pero con el tiempo, aprendieron a aceptar nuevos platos culinarios estadounidenses y el inglés como su idioma principal. Aprenden a leer, escribir y hablar inglés. A medida que los niños nacen en sus familias, los envían a la escuela para que se conviertan en escritores y hablantes de inglés con fluidez.

Con el tiempo, sus hijos se convierten en traductores e intérpretes para sus padres. Los padres comprenden mejor el inglés. He notado que estos padres entienden inglés y continúan hablándoles su idioma principal a sus hijos, pero en muchas familias inmigrantes, sus hijos solo responden a sus padres en inglés.

Este ciclo genera preocupación. Cuando esos niños crecen y se convierten en padres, les hablan en inglés a sus hijos. Sus hijos llegan a utilizar el inglés como lengua materna y dejan su lengua materna como una cosa del pasado. Las generaciones futuras llegarán a perder décadas de tradiciones y su conocimiento del idioma de su familia en unos pocos años.

El idioma principal de mi familia, el español, es uno de los muchos idiomas que las familias inmigrantes están perdiendo con el tiempo. A medida que las familias pierden la capacidad de comprender el idioma principal de sus antepasados, también se pierden muchas tradiciones. Alentar a las familias a compartir y cultivar sus tradiciones y continuar enseñando a sus hijos el idioma principal de sus antepasados. Esto ayuda a los niños a comprender su herencia y apreciar a sus antepasados. Ayuda a los niños a mantener un sentido de sí mismos y les ayuda a comprender la importancia de la herencia de su familia.



## VPK Registration Information



Have you heard of Voluntary PreKindergarten (VPK) but are not sure what it is or how it works?

**What is VPK?** It is a free educational program provided by the state for 4-year-olds. Studies demonstrate that children who complete VPK or attend even a portion of VPK are far more prepared to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. **Who is eligible?** Children who are 4 and live in Florida. Children born between February 2 and September 1 may wait until the following year to enroll when they are 5. **When are applications accepted?** Parents can submit an application at any time during the year, but open enrollment for the 2021-22 VPK program is currently under way. **When is VPK offered?** Children can attend a VPK school year program or a summer VPK program. Parents of 4-year-olds with special needs have an option outside the classroom setting through the VPK Specialized Instructional Services (VPK-SIS).

The Office of Early Learning's VPK Flyer is available [here](#).

### Here is what you will need to apply:

- A valid **email account**.
- **Proof of child's age** - could be a copy of birth certificate or immunization records.
- **Proof of residency** - for example a copy of your driver's license OR utility OR current signed lease.  
\*The name and address must match the name and address on the application.

### Here is how simple it is to apply:

- Visit the **OEL Family Portal**: <https://familyservices.floridaearlylearning.com/>
- Establish a **user** account
  - New User – create an account
  - Returning User – enter your user name and password
- **Complete** the **application** and scan/submit any necessary documents.
- **Submit** your application.

You will receive an email from your local Early Learning Coalition (ELC) with further instructions.

**Tip:** Be sure to check the spam folder for your email. Click [here](#) to locate your early learning coalition.

If your child qualifies, you will receive a **Certificate of Eligibility** from the ELC that you will take to the VPK provider/program you wish your child to attend.

### Helpful VPK Resources and Links:

VPK Handbook: What Parents Need to Know and Understand about Florida VPK <http://bit.ly/FLVPKHandbook>

How to Register for VPK: <http://bit.ly/RegisterVPK>

Apply for VPK: <https://familyservices.floridaearlylearning.com/>

Information about VPK for Families: <http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/vpk/families>

VPK Fact Sheet for Families: <http://bit.ly/VPKFactSheet>

For **further support**, please contact your local early learning coalition.  
Contact information can be found [here](#) (<http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/coalitions>).





## All About the Birds

Did you know that birds are one of only three animal groups that can fly? Besides insects and bats, birds have been soaring across the sky for 60 million years. To celebrate our winged friends, this month is National Bird Feeding Month and on February 3<sup>rd</sup> it is Feed the Birds Day. Spend time outside with your child bird watching, going to the park or lake to feed ducks or [create a bird feeder](#) to hang outside your child's bedroom window or in a tree in the backyard. While building the bird feeder together, ask your child to watch for and talk about the birds that they see around your home or neighborhood. Ask, "Do you hear the bird chirping?" or "Do you see that bird? What color is it?" You can find a [guide](#) from the [Audubon](#) website to help you and your child know what type of birds are near you.

### Materials for Bird Feeder:

1. Base: pine cones, an empty paper towel roll or a stale piece of bread
2. Peanut butter or honey
3. Treats: Raisins, cranberries, unsalted and unbuttered popcorn, sunflower seeds, shelled plain peanuts or mixed birdseed
4. Wire, dental floss or cotton string
5. A hook to hang the feeder



### Directions:

1. Help your child cover the base with either peanut butter or honey. If your child has peanut allergies, use honey instead.
2. Mix the selected treats together and roll the feeder in the mixture.
3. Take the wire, dental floss or cotton string and thread it through the feeder. Help your child tie the ends together to make a loop.
4. Hang the feeder by the hook in a place you can see.



Show love to your child on February 14<sup>th</sup> and every day with these [tips](#) and [ideas for activities](#).



Share a photo of your loved ones with us on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) using #LoveForEveryone.

Enjoy [learning more about birds](#) with your child and spending time watching the new feeder together!

## Read Across America & Dr. Suess

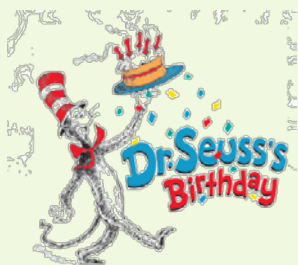
Read Across America is an annual event sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA) and is celebrated on March 2. It was created to motivate children to read and to celebrate reading. The 2021 Read Across America theme is Celebrating a Nation of Diverse Readers. The annual celebration takes place on Dr. Suess' birthday, March 2, but the NEA encourages schools to [celebrate reading all year long](#). The [goal](#) is to spread the love of reading and share how your family, classroom and community encourages reading and promotes reading as a fun activity!

Every month the [NEA](#) celebrates diverse readers with books, authors and [teaching resources](#). The NEA shares books that show diverse cultures and experiences. Choose a book from their calendar and an activity from their list of [virtual and physically distanced activities](#) to use with your child. You can find [resources for collecting free books on their site](#).



The [2020-2021 calendar](#) is available for families and educators. Each month has a new theme. [February's](#) is practicing empathy. The book recommended is *A Ride to Remember: A Civil Rights Story*. The book is about a little girl named Sharon who is the first African American to ride the carousel at a park in 1963.

Since March 2 is also Dr. Suess's birthday, [Dr. Suess Enterprises partners with NEA to promote Read Across America](#) to bring together schools, communities, and families to join in reading. [Teachers](#) and [parents](#) can find resources to use in their classrooms and homes to celebrate this day of reading!



Share a photo with us on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) to show how you are getting involved to celebrate reading in your home or community by using the hashtags #ReadAcrossAmerica and #ReadForDrSuess.



### February Special Dates:



2<sup>nd</sup> Groundhog Day

11<sup>th</sup> Make A Friend Day

7<sup>th</sup> Wear Red Day

14<sup>th</sup> Valentine's Day

9<sup>th</sup> Stop Bullying Day

15<sup>th</sup> President's Day

Richard Corcoran  
Commissioner of Education  
Shan Goff  
Executive Director



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