

## 3-5-years-old

Children in this age range thoroughly enjoy storybooks – and you may want to develop a box based on a traditional tale such as *The Gingerbread Man*. In this box you could put some pastry cutters, plastic animals from the story, a simple storybook, and some recipes for biscuits.

Boxes linked to popular TV programmes – for example from the BBC's *Cbeebies*, or *Bob the Builder* – can be very absorbing, as they tap into topics that the children share with their parents at home, and that they possibly know more about than you do! Resources and extension activities for these programmes can be downloaded from the Internet; for example simple games for *In the Night Garden*.

You can encourage mark-making by providing a large sheet of paper, for example cut from a roll of lining

paper, and some crayons or felt pens. With the children you can

draw and colour a world for

your toys to play in, such as a garden for birds, a building site, a football pitch, or a zoo. This is popular with school-age children, who start to experiment with writing and numbers.

Michael Jones, early language consultant. With special thanks to Tracey Spence, advisory teacher for children with speech and language difficulties in Luton, who devised chatterboxes

## Extending activities for 5-8-year-olds

Children of this age love collecting objects and storing them, so asking them to make up their own chatterbox on their favourite theme can be a sure-fire winner of an activity! A builder's chatterbox, for example, could contain some real tools, such as a spanner, a set of Allen keys, a metal measuring tape and a spirit level. Children can get very excited about learning the names of new items such as tools, and this can be encouraged in the role-play that develops from a chatterbox of this kind. If you include a storybook and an information book or a catalogue from your local hardware shop, and share these with the children, you will be extending their vocabulary in a natural way.

You can include simple prompt cards with questions like: 'How many tools can you name?', 'Can we make a "snap" matching card game, using photos cut out from a catalogue?', 'Can we make up our own story about a building site, or a new *Bob the Builder* story?'

### Getting parents involved

This is an ideal activity for engaging parents. They can contribute to the boxes, by lending or donating toys or everyday objects. You might even suggest making up a chatterbox that reflects the family culture, or interests, such as a 'French chatterbox', with objects from France; a French flag, and map and French books and vocabulary.

Chatterboxes about the family football team are particularly popular with dads! You may want to lend chatterboxes to take home for a short while, but make sure that parents know how to use them, for example, ensuring that they are always with the children, and that they know the boxes are for developing talk.

*'You might suggest making up a chatterbox that reflects the family interests'*

