

**Bags can be used as the starting point for a range of fun language and sensory experiences.**



**Communication,  
language and  
literacy (CLL)**

# It's in the bag!

## Essential resources

- Bags and purses of all sorts
- Canvas or cloth bags
- Plastic carrier bags (including 'bags for life')



Tear out and file these pages so you can use them again and again

People have been making and using bags for centuries: for transporting objects (particularly bought at the market or shops), and for storage. As well as being useful, a bag can often tell us a lot about the person who is carrying it. But whether it is a net bag, a designer handbag, or a simple carrier bag, at the end of the day it is a piece of material with handles for putting things in and carrying!

One of the main reasons why bags appeal to young children is that they offer endless opportunities for allowing them to choose what they can put in them. What we offer the children to go with the bag can lead to a lot of spontaneous exploration, sorting and matching. Most young children go through stages of emptying containers and then filling them up again, just for the sake of it. Because bags are often just that bit more difficult to empty and fill than rigid containers with lids, very young children may need a bit more support to get going with exploring bags. Nevertheless, they offer a good challenge for emerging skills.

Bags can be a tidy and attractive way to store a large variety of objects, particularly if they are hung on a peg rail. Decorative drawer knobs attached to a piece of wood can provide an attractive way of hanging the bags on the wall, or a small coat rail with hooks may be all that is needed. If the bags are hung at the children's height they can access their own resources. Children enjoy being able to make choices about what they can play with, and putting objects into bags and hanging them on pegs can make tidying up a very satisfying experience.

Bags come in many shapes and sizes and, if we include purses, then we have endless opportunities for role-play, which will naturally include going shopping. Many children like to 'transport' objects around the house and outdoors, and some children like to have a bag with them at all times: you never know what you might find in your childminder's house!

Most charity shops have a supply of bags and purses, but bags can also

## EYFS links

These activities can help children to:

- Learn new words very rapidly and be able to use them in communicating about matters which interest them (Language for Communication, 22-36 months).
- Listen to others in one-to-one and small groups when conversation interests them (Language for Communication, 30-50 months).
- Use vocabulary focused on objects that are of particular importance to them (Language for Communication, 30-50 months).
- Begin to experiment with language, describing possession (Language for Communication, 30-50 months).
- Have confidence to speak to others about their own interests (Language for Communication, 40-60+ months).
- Sustain attentive listening, responding to what they have heard with relevant comments, questions or actions (Language for Communication, ELG).
- Speak clearly and audibly with confidence and control and show awareness of the listener (Language for Communication, ELG).
- Use language as a powerful means of sharing feelings, experiences and thoughts (Language for Thinking, 22-36 months).
- Use talk, actions and objects to recall and relive past experiences (Language for Thinking, 30-50 months).
- Use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events (Language for Thinking, ELG).
- Show interest in print in the environment (Reading, 30-50 months).
- Know information can be relayed in the form of print (Reading, 30-50 months).

## Cross-curricular

- CD: Respond to what they see, hear, smell, touch and feel (Being Creative – Responding to Experiences, Expressing and Communicating Ideas, 8-20 months).
- CD: Respond in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and feel (Being Creative – Responding to Experiences, Expressing and Communicating Ideas, ELG).

be made by adults and children from pillowcases, duvet covers, tea towels, and even curtains! If these have an attractive design, such as Bob the Builder or animals, then children are often particularly attracted to them.

Cloth cut up into a variety of sizes can be made into bags with different fastenings: drawstrings, elastic, poppers, buttons, or toggles. Some companies specialise in supplying plain drawstring bags that can be decorated, such as The Clever Baggers Ltd at [www.thecleverbaggers.co.uk](http://www.thecleverbaggers.co.uk). Please be aware of the possible risks posed by larger bags with long drawstrings, and any activities with plastic carrier bags must be supervised at all times.

## 3-5-years-old

Bags full of objects of different textures, or that make different sounds, or ones that are related to a child's particular interest – for example ballet or football – all stimulate interest and conversation. Bags can be decorated to hold props for stories or nursery rhymes.

A bag is an ideal prop for 'barrier games' where children have to describe an object to someone who can't see it, and who has to guess what it is.

Being able to recognise logos is an important prerequisite for early reading, and involving children in games with bags from local shops can be a great way of promoting early word recognition.

'Delivering the milk' is a fun game that can be played outdoors. Collect plastic 'bags for life' and milk cartons with matching logos from various supermarkets. Hang the bags on a line, and help the children to sort the cartons and 'deliver the milk' to the right shop by putting the right carton in the corresponding bag. This activity is great fun, and generates a lot of conversation and early reading and mathematical skills

Michael Jones and Lou Threapleton  
Photos feature colour bags designed by Lou Threapleton, filled with objects and activities and ideas cards for parents

## 0-3-years-old

Very young children like to dangle and shake bags, so if we fill them with collections of hard objects, they can feel the texture and listen to the sound they make. As their fine motor control develops, we can present the children with a bag and a collection of objects, such as shells or pegs, and they can sort the objects and see how many they can fit in. This stimulates mathematical thinking and language.

'Feely bag' activities, where you place a 'mystery' object inside the bag and

children have to feel the bag and guess what is inside, are popular with children of all ages.

Building a collection of bags with different opening and closing mechanisms – clasps, zips, toggles, and so on – will enhance children's exploratory experience, and develop their fine manipulative skills.

Placing little mirrors and photos inside can also extend children's curiosity and encourage conversation.



### Tips for extending activities to older children

- Older children enjoy designing and making bags. Plain cloth or even a pillowcase can be made to look exciting if it is tie-dyed, or decorated using fabric crayons and paints. This can be a good opportunity to introduce sewing skills!

### Tips for involving parents

- Encourage parents to donate old handbags and shopping bags, wallets and purses. A 'chatter bag' is a bag that can be sent home and returned with objects inside from home that parents know their child will be keen to talk about with you. This is a valuable way of making links with home, and can particularly help children with the settling-in process, or those who need extra support with speech and language development.