

Word Wonders Activity 1: Animal Action Words

CHILDREN ARE LEARNING TO...

- Use simple vocabulary to describe actions and movements (18 to 48 months)
- Recognize/understand simple language describing familiar actions and movements (18 to 48 months)
- Understand and use language for making comparisons, like fast/slow or big/small (36 to 48 months)

ACTIVITY SUMMARY:

In this activity, children will explore new words that describe movements and actions (verbs). There are many opportunities in this activity for children to hear, use, and practice new vocabulary, including action words. Some children may only listen. Others may attempt to say these new words. Others will be able to repeat portions or whole words as they hear them over and over. Typically, children will first recognize or *understand* the meaning of a word, then they may *say* it occasionally, and finally, they will *use* the word as part of their regular vocabulary in conversation. Repetition over time is key to learning new vocabulary.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Book: *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle

For Activity 1 (ENGAGE):

Handout 1: Animal Images

- Masking tape or blanket (large enough for 3 people to stand on)
- Optional: 6 manila folders, glue/stapler (if you want to make images sturdier for reuse)

For Activity 2 (EXPAND):

None

PREPARATION:

For Activity 1 (ENGAGE):

- Print **Handout 1**. Keep these images aside and in order until the activity. If you wish to make them sturdier for reuse, cut 6 manila folders in half. Glue/staple each image to a folder half.
- Choose a space for this activity where there is room for children to sit in a semi-circle on the floor looking at a "stage" area you will create using the masking tape (tape off a large square on the floor) or by laying down a blanket (large enough for 3 people to stand on).

For Activity 2 (EXPAND):

- None

Activity Instructions

EXPLORE:

Share the following book and extension activity with children as an opportunity to help children understand, repeat, and use action words.

Book: *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle

As You Read:

- **Introduce the book and its key ideas.** *In this story, different animals do different things, I wonder if you can do the same things as the animals!* Try using different voices for the different animals as you read.
- **Define new words and phrases.** Some of the actions mentioned here may be new to children (thump, arch). Point to the pictures to show what these verbs mean (for example, to beat your chest or bend your back like a cat) and demonstrate yourself. Have children copy the motions. Some of the animals pictured in this book may also be new to children. For example, introduce the “macaw” as a colorful bird that lives in warm places and eats seeds, fruits, flowers, and leaves.
- **Prompt children to repeat key phrases and pause for children to fill-in-the-blank.** Encourage participation by having children perform each action and repeat the phrase “I can do it!” Prompt children to join in and chant the sentence with you.
- **Make connections to children’s lives.** Ask the children whether they have ever seen a [pick an animal from the book]? Where did they see it? Ask: *What is your favorite animal?*

ENGAGE – ACTIVITY 1

Explain the game: *We are going to do a show together! We’re going to act out the story we just shared. We’ll pretend to be the different animals and do all their different actions.*

Play the game:

For children 18 to 30 months old:

Have children sit in a semi-circle in front of the “stage” you have created.

Invite a child to join you on the stage, facing the seated children. Hold up the **penguin** picture.

Say: *I am a penguin and I turn my head. Can you do it?* (Great to use different voices here!)

Encourage all the children to chant in response: “I can do it!” (At this age, children may not join in or just say a word or two of the response.)

Prompt the child who is standing with you to turn their head. (You may need to model this action first. High five and then have them return to the circle.)

Choose another child to join you on the stage. **Repeat** with a different child/different picture for each action depicted in the book:

- giraffe (bend my neck)
- buffalo (raise my shoulders)
- monkey (wave my arms)
- seal (clap my hands)
- gorilla (thump my chest)

- cat (arch my back)
- crocodile (wiggle my hips)
- camel (bend my knees)
- donkey (kick my legs)
- elephant (stomp my foot)
- child (wiggle my toe)

Wrap-up: *I had so much fun telling this story using our bodies and our voices. Now let's try one last question: I am your teacher and I blow you a kiss. Can you do it?* (Model and wait for children respond: "I can do it!")

For children 30 to 48 months old:

Have children sit in a semi-circle across from the "stage."

Invite two children to join you on the stage, facing their peers. Give one the **penguin** picture.

Prompt them to say: "I am a penguin and I turn my head. Can you do it?"

Encourage the other child to turn their head and say, "I can do it!"

The child who was the penguin can return to the circle.

Choose another child to join their peer on the stage. Hand the next picture to the child from the first round and prompt them to say the line ("I am a giraffe and I bend my neck. Can you do it?"). The newest child to join performs the action and says, "I can do it!"

Repeat with a different child for each action depicted in the book/picture cards:

- giraffe (bend my neck)
- buffalo (raise my shoulders)
- monkey (wave my arms)
- seal (clap my hands)
- gorilla (thump my chest)
- cat (arch my back)
- crocodile (wiggle my hips)
- camel (bend my knees)
- donkey (kick my legs)
- elephant (stomp my foot)
- child (wiggle my toe)

Explain: *Children, now it's your turn to think of an animal and something they do. I'll go first: I am a bear and I growl so loudly! Can you do it?* (Wait for the children to respond.)

Ask for volunteers: *Does anyone have an animal in mind? What can that animal do?* (Let children take turns making up animals/actions for their peers to perform.)

If you need ideas to expand the game, consider the following suggestions:

- dog/wag my tail
- rabbit/hop
- bird/fly
- fish/swim
- snake/say “sssss”
- turtle/walk very slowly
- crab/pinch their claws
- raccoon/wash their hands

Wrap-Up: *Today’s story was all about all the different ways that animals can move, and we can too! This story helped us learn some important new words to describe the ways our bodies move. Does anyone remember any words from the story? What was your favorite action word? (Wait for children to share.) I really liked our show and all the words we learned together!*

EXPAND – ACTIVITY 2

For children 18 to 36 months old:

Gather the children in a space where they can sit comfortably in a circle or semi-circle.

Explain: *In our story, we learned what different animals could do. But in this game, we get to learn what you can do! I’m going to share a little rhyme and you get to tell me or show me something you can do with your bodies. Ready? Let’s go.*

Say the rhyme, choosing a child in your group to go first:

Let’s do what (child’s name) can do,

(Child’s name) can do,

(Child’s name) can do,

Let’s do what our friend can do.

We can do it too!

Ask the child: *Show (or tell) me something your body can do.* (If needed, offer a prompt; see below.)

Younger children may not yet have a range of actions they can perform at a moment’s notice. Have some simple actions in mind if children need ideas—for example: wave hands, wiggle your middle, reach to the sky, touch your toes, kick your foot, turn around, dance in place, give yourself a hug, give me a high-five, etc.

Announce: Everyone, (child’s name) can (insert action, like wave their hands). We can do it too! (Perform the action.)

Repeat the rhyme, choosing a new child this time. Continue until all children have had a turn.

Encourage children to join in saying phrases or words in the rhyme, as they are able. The rhyme will become familiar to children through repetition.

For children 36 to 48 months old:

Explain: *In our story, we learned what different animals could do. But in this game, we get to learn what you can do! I'm going to share a little rhyme and you get to tell me or show me something you can do with your bodies. Ready? Let's go.*

Choose a child to go first. Point to the child as you say the rhyme. Model the rhyme first:

Let's do what (child's name) can do,

(Child's name) can do,

(Child's name) can do,

Let's do what our friend can do.

We can do it too!

Encourage the group to join in chanting the rhyme.

Ask: *(Selected child), what can you do?*

Encourage the child to make a simple sentence using a body part and action word like: "I can raise my hands."

Chant the final portion of the rhyme: *Let's do what our friend can do. We can do it too!* (Perform the action and prompt the other children to join in.)

Continue until all children have had a turn to make an action sentence.

Wrap-up by taking a turn yourself:

Let's do what Teacher can do,

Teacher can do,

Teacher can do,

Let's do what Teacher can do.

I can...wave good-bye!

The game is done, so let's all do it too!

REFLECT

Return to a gathering area with the children.

Say: *Today we learned many new words to describe all the ways our bodies can move! Let's finish our time together with a special movement challenge for each of you.*

Ask each child to perform a movement, like those below:

- touch toes
- bend to the side
- shrug their shoulders
- nod their head
- shake their arms
- reach for the sky
- bend their knees
- wave hello
- clap hands

Ask children if they would like to give you an action word challenge.

SUMMARIZE: *Today we learned new action words like stomp, arch, kick, and bend. We played a game where we each got a turn to show our friends an action we can do. Now we have lots of different ways to talk about the way we move our arms, legs, and bodies!*

INDIVIDUALIZING THE ACTIVITY

Make it more challenging:

- In Activity 1, you can ask each child to choose their favorite animal and describe an action it makes. Print out or copy a picture of this animal and add it to the game. This is a great way of expanding the verbs that children are exposed to while playing.
- In Activity 2, give children a turn to say their own action word sentence (like, "I can raise my hands") before you jump in with a suggestion or idea. Sometimes pausing for just a few seconds is a good strategy. Children's working memory (the words and concepts that are immediately accessible to them) and their processing time (the time it takes for them to hear and understand what was said to them) is still developing. Pausing gives them time to formulate a response.

Make it less challenging:

- In Activity 1, focus the activity on 5 of the more familiar animals and movements. Add additional animals and movements as children master the existing set.
- In Activity 2, rather than prompting children to come up with their own sentence, you can ask: *Can you raise your hands* and then continue with the rhyme (*Let's do what our friend can do. We can do it too.*)

MAKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE DAY:

- Offer the book and pictures (Activity 1 materials) as a game that children can choose during free play. Keep the “stage” in place for a few days to see if children want to return to this activity.
- Use rich and descriptive action words in daily routines. At mealtime, children might: *munch, chew, swallow, drink, sip, stir, suck from a straw, pick up with fingers, scoop with a spoon, etc.*
- During outdoor play, notice aloud how children are moving their bodies. Children might *leap, swing, balance, stumble, hop, run, drop, crawl, climb, clamber, crawl, etc.*
- At nap or rest-time, describe how our bodies feel at rest: *Our bodies are not moving. They are still. Our hands rest on our bellies. Our legs lay straight out on the cot. Our heads sit heavily on the pillow. Our backs press firmly against the cot. Let’s take big, deep breaths to rest.*
- Give children some practice with actions that can help them to regulate when they are having big feelings. Often the image of *sniffing a flower* or *blowing a candle* (deep breaths) are used with young children. Practice these actions at calm moments across the day and, once they are familiar to children, prompt the use of these actions during periods of upset.

MAKING MATH CONNECTIONS

Challenge children to adjust their movements—which helps them practice self-regulation and learn about comparisons (an early math measurement concept).

For example: *Can they take a BIG step and then a very small step? Can they yell very LOUD and then whisper very quietly? Can they run QUICKLY and then walk very slowly?* Activities like these take a lot of self-control and can be a lot of fun (and challenging too!) for children.

Song: *Jungle Jive*

Deep in the jungle, 'mong the trees and plants
There is a place where all the animals dance
It's lots of fun and if you'd like to try
They all invite you to the Jungle Jive!

(Model dancing)

I am a python, and I slither around
I am a python, slith'ring down on the ground
I am a python with a slithery vibe
Now be a python; show your slithery jive!

(Model curvy movements like a snake)

(Encourage children to "slither" around)

(MOVEMENT INTERLUDE)

I am a peacock, and I strut my stuff.
I am a peacock; strut with feathery fluff!
I am a peacock, with a struttin' stride
Now be a peacock; show your struttin' jive!

(Model strutting around, poking neck out)

(Encourage children to "strut" around)

(MOVEMENT INTERLUDE)

I am a panther, and I like to pounce
I am a panther, and I jump and bounce
I am a panther, with a pouncy vibe
Now be a panther; show your pouncy jive!

(Model pouncing like a panther – jump up)

(Encourage children to "pounce" – jump/bounce)

(MOVEMENT INTERLUDE)

I am a parrot, and I like to sing
I am a parrot, and I sing anything!
I am a parrot, with a sweet song jive
Now be a parrot; show your singing jive!

(Model flapping wings and pretending to sing
"la la la!")

(Encourage children who are ready to "sing" along
On the "la la la's")

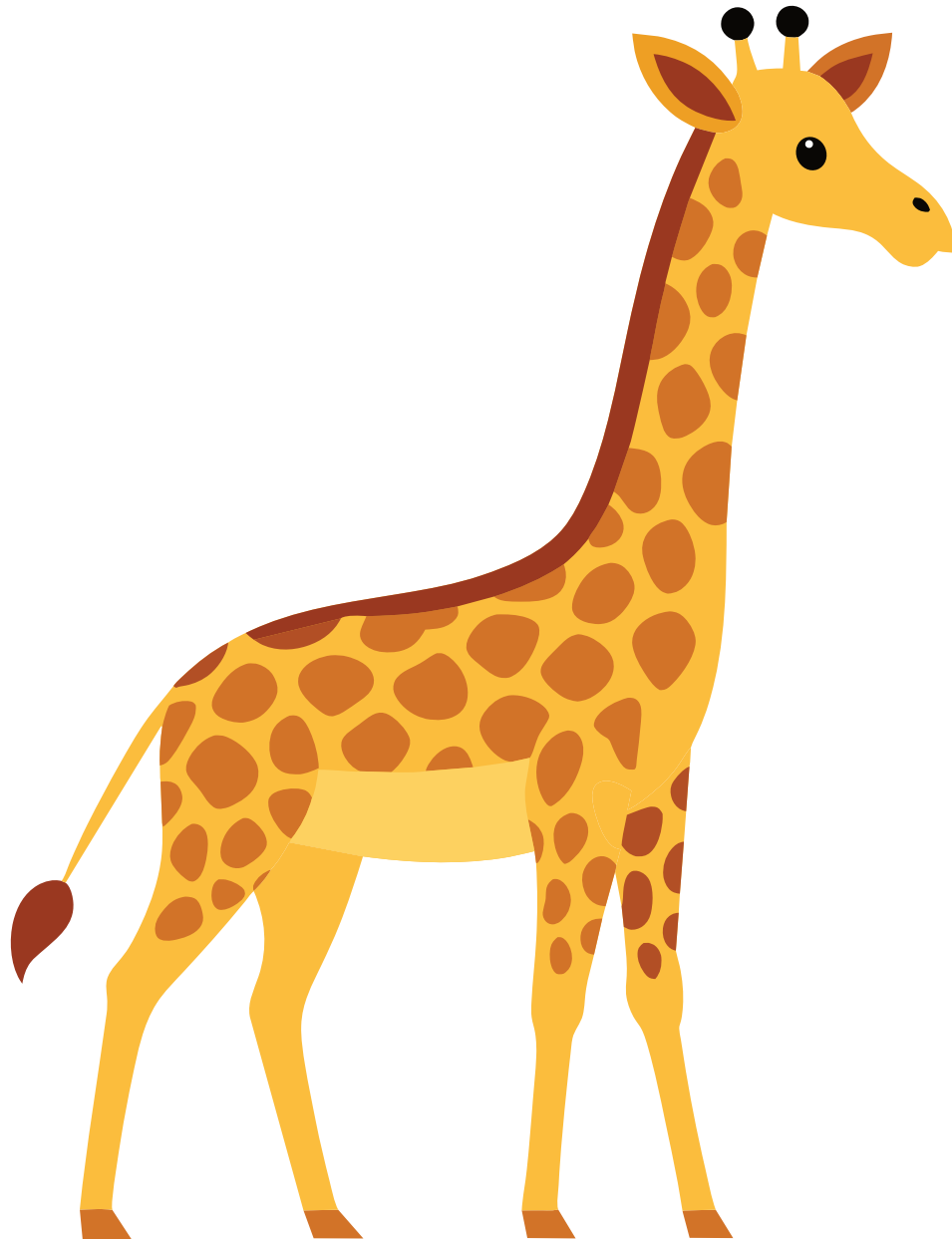
--la La la La, La la La la la! (Hello)
--la La la La, La la La la la! (Hello)
It's lots of fun and if you'd like to try
They all invite you to the Jungle Jive!

(Make an animal "pose" at the end!)

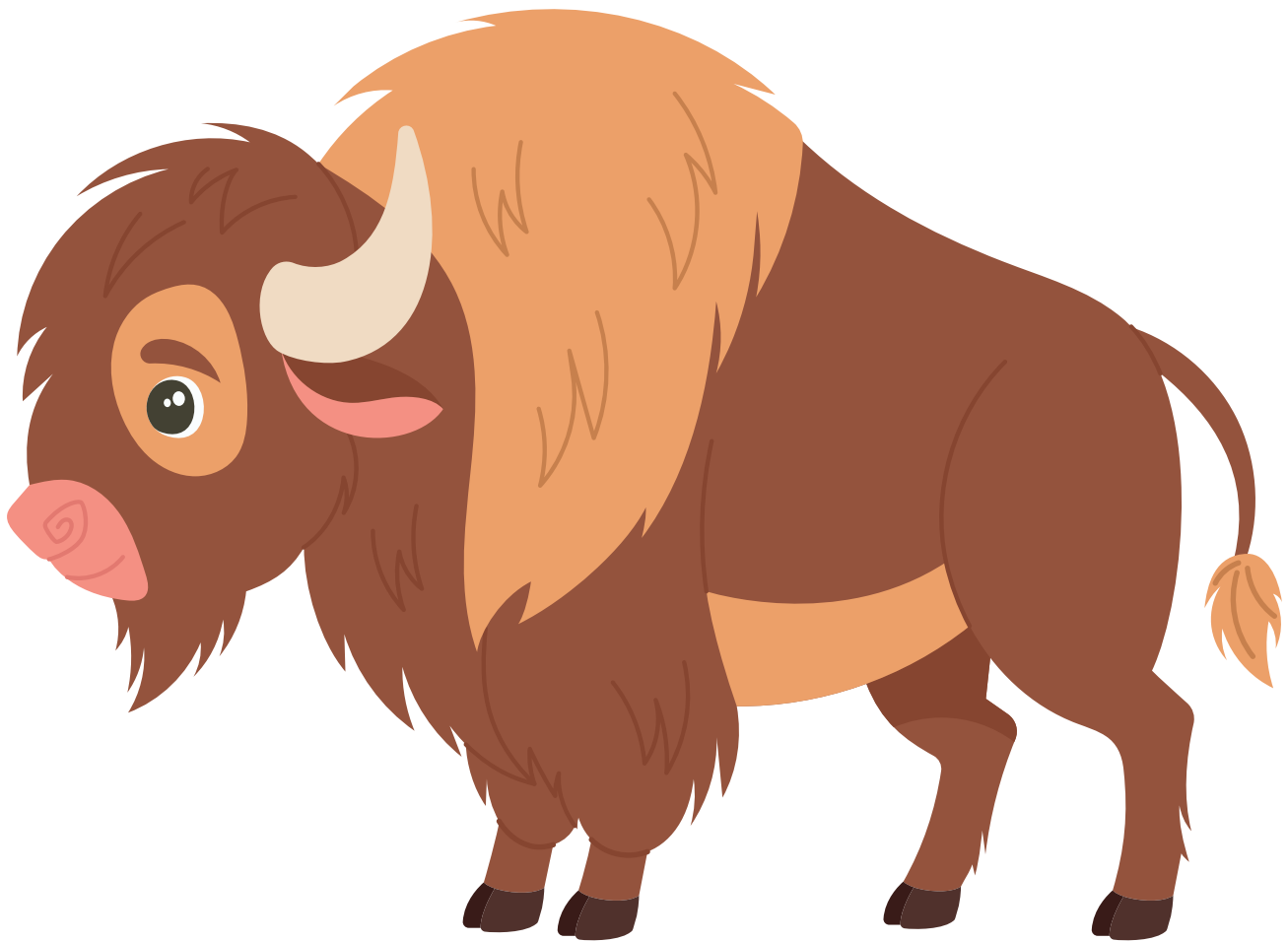
Handout 1: Animal Images



I am a penguin and I turn my head.



I am a giraffe and I bend my neck.



I am a buffalo and I raise my shoulders.



I am a monkey and I wave my arms.



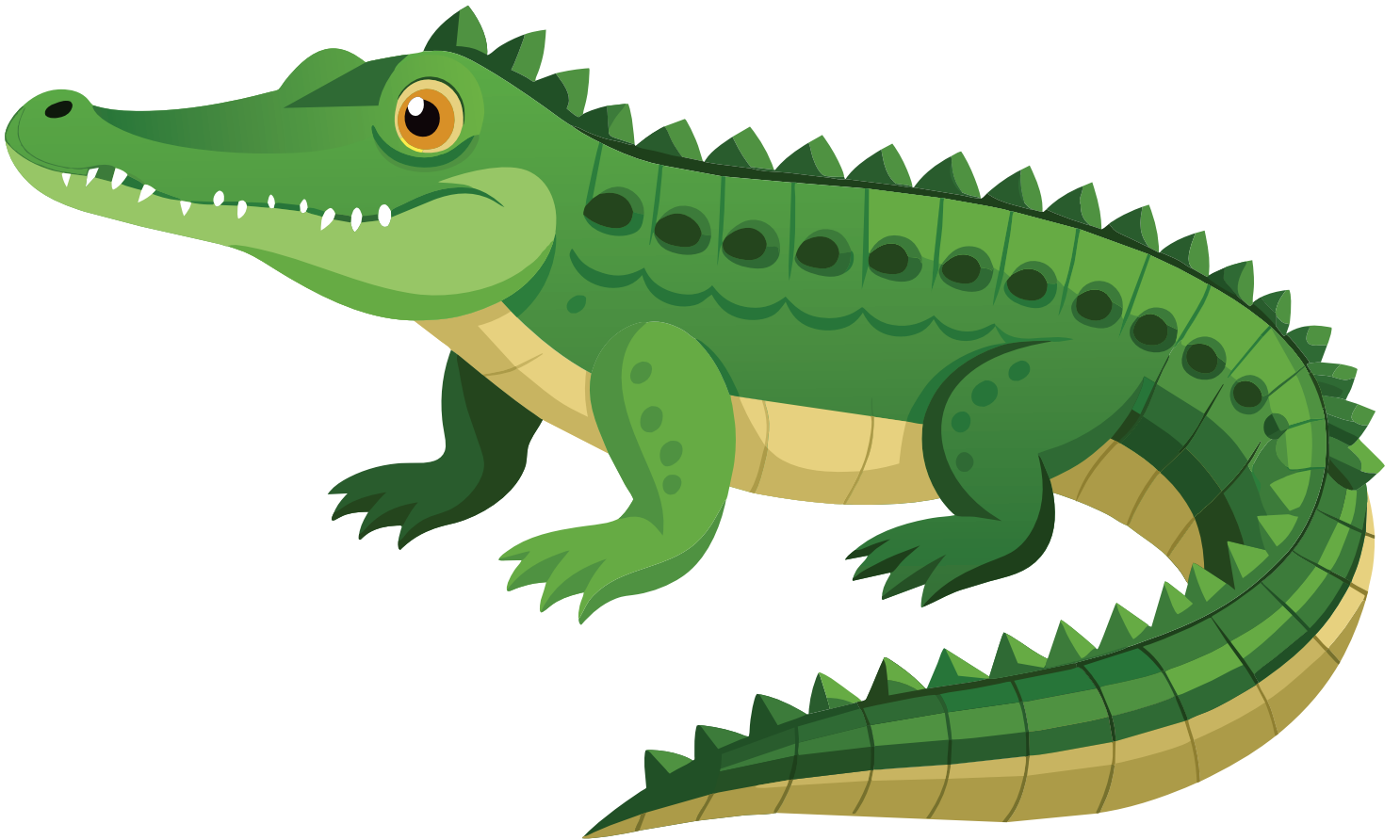
I am a seal and I clap my hands.



I am a gorilla and I thump my chest.



I am a cat and I arch my back.



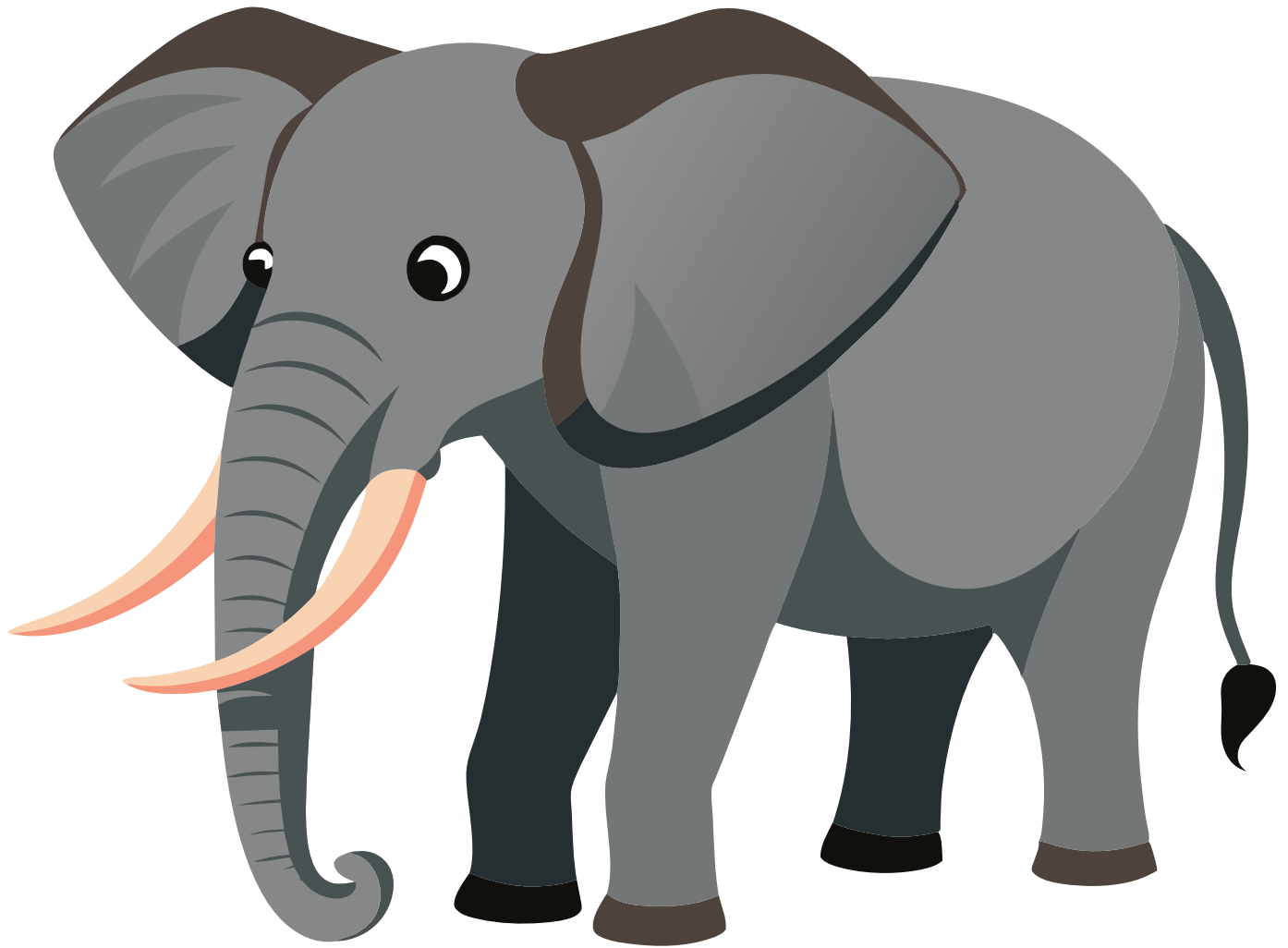
I am a crocodile and I wriggle my hips.



I am a camel and I bend my knees.



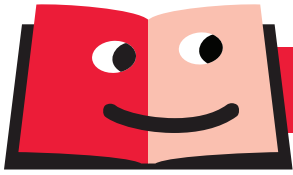
I am a donkey and I kick my legs.



I am an elephant and I stomp my foot.



I am I and I wiggle my toe.



Exciting Action Words

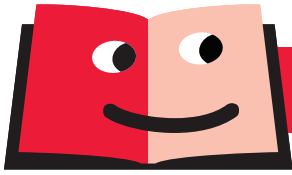
This week, children began learning words that describe movements and actions (verbs). These words help children talk about the activities they do in the world around them. At home, there are lots of ways to help your child learn new action words by moving and talking together.

Play “Can you...”: Ask your child, “I can touch my toes...can you?” Wait to see if your child can too. Then give them a turn to ask you to do an action. If they aren’t talking yet, they might make a movement and watch to see if you will copy it. Use words to describe what they do: “You can point your fingers! I can too!”

During Everyday Moments: Describe what you’re doing using action words. Tell your child how you *fold* the shirts, *wash* the broccoli, or *rake* the leaves. Look for ways to include them in these activities so they can do it too!

While You’re Waiting: It seems we’re always waiting...for the bus or train, to see a doctor, or for the grocery cashier. While you wait, ask if your child wants to play an “action game.” Think of actions you can do together—a high-five, a clap, holding hands, touching index fingers, pointing your toes, bumping your hips, etc. Describe these movements as you do them together.





Solo para familias

Palabras interesantes que indican una acción

Esta semana, los niños empezaron a aprender palabras que describen movimientos y acciones. Estos *verbos* ayudan a que los niños digan lo que ven y lo que hacen en el mundo que los rodea. En casa, hay muchas maneras de ayudar a que su niño aprenda nuevas palabras de acción mientras se mueven y hablan entre ustedes.

Jueguen a “¿Puedes tú...?”: Pregúntele a su niño, “Puedo tocarme los dedos de mis pies ...¿puedes tú?” Espere a ver si su hijo también puede. Luego, dele el turno para que el niño le pida que haga una acción. Si el niño todavía no sabe hablar, es posible que haga un movimiento y observe si usted puede copiarlo. Use palabras para describir lo que el niño hace: “¡Puedes señalar con el dedo! ¡Yo también puedo hacerlo!”

En momentos de la vida diaria: Describa lo que está haciendo usando palabras de acción. Dígale a su niño cómo *dobla* las camisas, *lava* el brócoli o *rastrilla* las hojas. ¡Busque maneras de incluir al niño en estas actividades para que también pueda hacerlas!

Mientras están esperando: Parece que siempre estamos esperando por algo... por el autobús o el metro, para ver a un médico, o por el cajero del supermercado. Mientras esperan, pregúntele a su niño si quiere jugar un “juego de acción”. Piense en las acciones que pueden hacer juntos —un “choca esos cinco”, una palmada, sujetarse de las manos, tocar los dedos índice, señalar los dedos de sus pies, chocar con las caderas, etc. Describa estos movimientos mientras los hacen juntos.

