



Cindy's Corner

Valentine Card



Delivering valentines is an ideal way to generate language and shape appropriate social skills. Finding Valentine's Day cards that are meaningful for children operating on a concrete level can be the challenge. Fortunately for teachers and parents of children with visual and multiple impairments, Family Fun Magazine has come to our rescue. I found numerous valentine suggestions that use tangible and familiar objects, perfect for students operating on a concrete level. I've chosen some of my favorites with adaptations and suggestions on how to make them concept-based. All of the activities can be individualized and used to develop basic concepts and skills.

Here are some of my favorite valentine suggestions, along with cute greetings from Family Fun. Have a contest to see if you can come up with even better slogans, it could make for a really interesting ELA lesson!

Sweets for the Sweet

"You are the apple of my eye"

"Orange you glad it's Valentine's Day?"

"I go bananas over you"

"We make a great pair!"

Material: Apples, bananas, oranges and pears



How cool is it to use actual pieces of fruit for valentines! It is a tangible, simple, and healthy way to give valentines and a good way to present humor on a concrete level. Packaging is optional (and can be done with staff assistance) allowing you to focus directly on developing the repetitive motor and communication skills needed to deliver valentines. Let each student choose his or her own fruit with the accompanying valentine slogan (*choice making*). Role-play the anticipated social interaction, using personal communication devices, pre-programmed switches, and rote scripts. Work on developing a smooth motor planning routine (e.g., knocking on doors, activating switches, picking up and passing fruit). Use modeling, language support

strategies, verbal and nonverbal prompts (such as an elbow prompt) to encourage initiation as needed. Be sure to provide enough time for processing before repeating cues.

For students who are mobile and able to carry the valentines independently, choose an appropriate bag, such as a messenger bag, or use a cart for delivery (*pushing/pulling*). For students who use wheelchairs or strollers for transport, fasten a box for the fruit onto wheelchair trays or laps by using Velcro or soft ties. Make transferring the fruit into the bag or box part of the experience. Picking up individual pieces of fruit is a functional way to work on *palmar grasp* and purposeful *grasp and release*. Counting the pieces of fruit as you transfer them incorporates *counting skills* and delivering valentines reinforces the concept of "*just one*" and *one-to-one correspondence* in a meaningful setting.

To expand on the fruit theme in the classroom before Valentine's Day, explore the fruit on a *sensory* level. Label each fruit and describe its shape, color, texture, smell, and taste (*attributes*). Compare characteristics. Pass each fruit from peer to peer to generate *language* and encourage *social skills*. Identify what category fruit belongs to (*classification*) and sort them into like groups (*discrimination*). If you can manage it, go to the grocery store and purchase the fruit (*community experience*). Use fruit for cooking and art projects (*following directions*). Read stories about where each fruit comes from and how it gets into stores for people to buy.

The next three valentine activities involve simple inserting and make perfect entry-level packaging activities. They provide meaningful ways to work on basic skills and concepts in a functional setting, e.g., one-to-one correspondence, basic concepts (in/out, up/down, on/off), left to right progression, sequencing, crossing the midline, one hand to stabilize, one to manipulate and purposeful grasp and release.

Popcorn Valentines

"You make my heart go pop"

Material:

- Individual packages of microwave popcorn or snack bags
- Popcorn boxes or available containers (You can get popcorn boxes at Party stores)





Hot Chocolate Valentines

"You warm my heart"

Material:

- Individual packages of hot chocolate mix
- Hot drink cups or valentine mugs

Shovel and Pail Valentines

"I dig you"

Material:

- Mini plastic pails with shovels
- Individual package of valentine candy



All three of the above activities can be structured in the same manner. Break the activity down into logical steps and structure the workspace to ensure a positive experience. For instance, the first thing you will need in each of the activities is the open container (popcorn sleeve / mug / pail), so position the bin of open containers on the left as a starting point. The items to be inserted go in the middle, with a "finish bin" on the right for the completed products. Using chairs on either side of the student for the start and finish bins can help to define the workspace for students new to the activity (it also encourages *range of motion* and *crossing the mid-line*). Give clear, concise, single step directions (*following directions*) and provide enough time for processing before giving additional cues or nonverbal prompts. If needed, use hand-under-hand modeling with verbal labeling until the motor pattern is established. Simplify the packaging activity by isolating one aspect, such as "put the popcorn in the box" with focus on the student's ability to initiate the single, repetitive direction with fading assists. You can also set the activity up cooperatively, assembly-line style, to encourage *social skills and communication*.

If you wish to include a paper valentine when delivering valentines, set this up as a separate activity, or at a separate workstation using the appropriate medium (Braille, large print, type, Mayer-Johnson pictures, etc.). You might want to ask another classroom to write the slogans for your class, or have staff prepare the paper valentine slogans in advance and insert them into the completed boxes as a separate activity.

This last valentine suggestion is a multi-step activity incorporating counting skills.

Teddy Bear Valentines

"Bear hugs from ____"

"Bag of Bear Hugs"

"I can't bear being without you!"

"You are so unbearably cute!"

"Bear Hugs"

"You are Beary special"



Material:

- A box of Teddy Grahams
- A bag of gummi bears
- Ziploc or cellophane bags
- Pipe cleaners cut in half in place of twist ties
- Latex gloves

This is a multi-step packaging activity, ideal for students working to develop independence and accurate counting skills. Incorporate *classification* and grouping by sets into the activity by sorting the Teddy Grahams and gummi bears before packaging. For some students, you might want to use the activity to focus on developing a single concept or a hand skill, such as using a pincer grasp to transfer each cookie, or each piece of candy, from a tray into a bin. To stabilize the bag for counting, insert it into a sturdy cup, jar or travel mug, with the top folded over the lip. Count out the desired number of Teddy Grahams and/or gummi bears into each bag. Assist as needed. Create visual or tactile cues (e.g., make a row of Mayer-Johnson Teddy Bears with the corresponding number, or glue on actual Teddy Grahams). Each student can do all the steps or work cooperatively - one could count out the Teddy Grahams and another could count out the gummi bears. Provide assistance with fastening Ziploc bags (pincer grasp) or using twist ties if needed.

Happy Valentine's Day!