



Planning your Bookbug Explorer Bag gifting celebration

Ages 3–4

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About this resource

Thank you for supporting the Bookbug programme by gifting Bookbug Explorer Bags. As an early years practitioner, you can play a key role in how the books and other materials are used in the family home. Planning a celebration can make the bags more meaningful to children and families.

We talk about **gifting** the bags rather than ‘giving’ them or ‘handing them out’. The bags and contents are a gift to children, but key to their usage is the involvement of parents and carers. Explaining to parents why their child is getting the bag can make a difference. Parents aren’t always aware of the impact they can have on their child’s learning, and how a simple song, rhyme or story can make a difference. Suggesting some simple, practical ideas based on the Bookbug Explorer Bag and encouraging them to join in with some songs, rhymes and stories can help to create a positive home learning environment.

Celebrate with an Explorer-themed gifting event or activity

There is no 'right' way to gift the Explorer Bags – much will depend on your setting, and the children and families you work with. What works best for one or two 3 year-olds in a childminder setting will be very different to a larger group of children in a nursery.

If you already have tried and tested ways to engage with parents and carers, such as Stay and Play or Bookbug Sessions, then you may wish to consider building the Explorer Bag into these existing activities (as and when guidance allows you to bring parents in to your setting).

Looking for inspiration? Read our case studies at the bottom of this document to explore how other practitioners have gifted the bags.

Here are some things to think about when planning how to gift the bags:

Work with your local library

Some settings have worked with their local library service to plan an Explorer-themed event, either inviting a member of library staff to their setting, or holding a gifting event at their local library. Contact your local library or Bookbug Co-ordinator to discuss what they can do to support you. Encourage families to visit their local library to 'explore' what's available and borrow other books.

Involve children in planning

How would the children like to celebrate receiving their Explorer Bags? A treasure hunt, picnic, or party? Involve them in your planning – if children have enjoyed the books in the bag and the stories have captured their interest, then they may have their own ideas about how to celebrate taking the bags home!

We understand that planning a gifting event in a mixed setting can be tricky when only the ante-preschool children are receiving a bag. Here are some tips and ideas to help you plan:

- **Involve the pre-school children in the gifting of the bags.** Explain to them that they received theirs last year and now they get the special job of presenting the bags to the younger children. If you took photos of them with

their bags last year, why not show them the photos and talk about the books from their bag. If you have a set of the books, why not read them again?

- **Gift a pre-loved book to the older children during your celebratory event.**
Your local community may be able to help you by donating good quality second-hand books
- **Plan a separate explorer-related activity for pre-schoolers** whilst the younger children celebrate receiving their bags.

Virtual or face-to-face?

Due to the social distancing guidelines that have been in place since 2020, there has been little opportunity for face-to-face conversations with parents at drop-off and pick-up, and no opportunity to bring them into your settings. Now that restrictions have eased, you may be planning face-to-face events. If you are still planning virtual celebrations we have also included some suggestions in this document for virtual celebrations. Please bear in mind that not all families use social media, and some lack the devices or connectivity to join in with virtual events. However you plan to celebrate gifting the bags, please let families know that their child will soon be bringing home their very own Bookbug Explorer Bag.

Model singing, rhyming and book sharing

Inviting parents to join in with a song, rhyme and story session is a great way to celebrate gifting the bag and encourage families to sing, rhyme and share stories at home. It's also something you can do remotely if parents can't join you in person. You could host a live session on platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, or record videos to share via social media or learning journals. Plans related to the books in the Bookbug Bags are available on the Scottish Book Trust website, or why not plan your own session incorporating the children's favourites?

Tips for your session:

- **Include a range of songs and rhymes** – be creative and incorporate songs and rhymes linked to the books in the bags, or to the broader theme of exploring as well as the children's favourites. If this is a new experience for families, include some old favourites in your selection as they are more likely to know the song and join in with you. Don't forget to repeat each song or

rhyme a few times. Signpost families to our free [Bookbug app](#) and [online Song and Rhyme library](#) for inspiration.

- **Share a story** – this is a great opportunity to model to parents how you can engage children with a story and go beyond the words on the page. Hopefully parents will see how much their children enjoy the experience of sharing a story, and how you can extend the story into play or songs and rhymes. Reading at least one of the books is a great way to model to families how you can bring a book to life using your voice and gestures. The children could help choose which of the Explorer Bag books you'll read by voting for their favourite.

Please note: The publishers of the 3 books in the Bookbug Explorer Bag have granted permissions for practitioners to read the books aloud online as part of a Bookbug Session. If you wish to read another book aloud during a virtual Bookbug Session, go to the publisher's website and check their permissions for doing so. You can also visit [online Bookbug Sessions: book recommendations and publisher permissions](#) on our website. Before reading aloud, please ensure you:

- Clearly show the front cover
- Say the names of the author and illustrator
- Say that you are reading the book 'by kind permission of [publisher]'

Show and tell – explore the bag contents

Take the chance to talk about the items in the bag and share ideas for using them with families, for example suggesting that the children could draw on the postcards and then parents could take their child to post the card to a relative or friend. It's also an opportunity to discuss the benefits of books and stories, and to encourage families to read the books in the bag again and again at home. If parents can't join you in person, think of other ways to share this information with them. Each bag contains a leaflet (Using Your Bookbug Explorer Bag) which provides tips for parents. You could also host a virtual coffee morning, and talk to parents about the Explorer Bag and singing, reading and rhyming with their child; share information via learning journals; or print off and send home your own ideas for simple activities to try at home.

Keep the conversation going afterwards

To encourage families to keep using the Explorer Bag at home, plan some follow-up activities or communications to parents and carers. This will also help to involve those who are be unable to attend virtual or in-person events.

Here are some ideas that other settings have shared with us:

- Share information about the event in children's learning journals, newsletters, emails and in phone calls. Create a display about the event or about the Bookbug Explorer Bag
- Post on social media channels during build up to gifting event and then share photos of the event afterwards. Parents can use the photos as a prompt to talk to their child about the event
- Use Twitter or other platforms to show how the children are engaging with the books, both in your setting and in the family home, encouraging families to tell you what their child has enjoyed doing
- If you have a library nearby, encourage families to find more explorer-themed books to enjoy at home.

Please keep sharing the books with children after the bags have gone home, and responding to their interests.

Gifting in practice – stories from early years settings

Kylie Watt, West Lothian

We had been planning a gifting event in April 2020 but due to the first Covid lockdown, it was rearranged for September when the nursery was open. Due to Covid restrictions, we could not invite parents to attend in person.

Ahead of the gifting, I read the three books in the Explorer bag to the children several times and placed the books on the nursery bookshelf within easy reach for the children and for them to access at any time.

We involved the children in planning the gifting event and they decided to have a pyjama party. This made it easy for the children to dress up as they all have pyjamas at home. The children chose to have hot chocolate and cookies for the event too. On the day, the children arrived at the nursery in their pyjamas and we re-read the three stories. After each story, I asked the children to indicate whether they liked the story or not using a “thumbs up” (they liked it), “thumbs down” (they did not like it) or “thumbs at the side” (it was OK). We then discussed why they did or did not like the book, and who their favourite characters were.

After the stories the children were shown all the contents of the bag, one by one, before the bags were gifted to each child. One boy couldn't believe he was being given a pack of pencils all for himself as he had to share a pack with his brother at home. His mum also said how delighted her son to receive them.

As the parents were not able to come into the nursery, I produced a [Sway](#) for parents and carers, containing photos and information from the Scottish Book Trust website about the contents and suggested activities for the parents to do with the children at home. Photos and video clips helped to bring our gifting event to life for families. To ensure we reached all families, we printed the sway off for children to take home - not all parents have computers or smart phones. I also downloaded a copy of the parent letter from the Scottish Book Trust website and included that in the Sway too.

Although we have not been able to get much feedback from parents, anecdotal comments from parents suggest that children really enjoy having the books and resources at home.

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Nikki Kirkwood, Falkirk

We started offering regular Bookbug Sessions to families as part of our plan to improve parental engagement. During conversations at drop-off and pick-up, we found out when parents would be most likely to come, and encouraged them to join us. Most parents had not been to a Bookbug Session before, and we hoped that coming along would encourage them to sing, rhyme and read with their children at home. The response was really positive, with mums, dads and grandparents coming along each week. We repeat many of the songs and rhymes throughout the session so that families become familiar with them. Our Explorer Bag gifting event took place during one of our sessions. We built up the excitement with children and families by letting them know that they would be getting a special gift from Bookbug. The children were involved in planning the event, and baked tasty treats for their guests.

On the day of the gifting event, which we held during Book Week Scotland, parents were invited in for a short stay and play session beforehand. Refreshments were available and they were able to sample the children’s delicious home baking. As we have a large number of children, we ran two gifting events to ensure that there was space for everyone to join in. Before gifting the bags, we sang some of the children’s favourite songs and then read one of the books from the Explorer Bag. As many of the parents and grandparents had already come along to one of our sessions, they were familiar with songs and joined in with the singing. After our story, we brought out a basket of Bookbug Explorer Bags and showed everyone what’s included in the bag and talked a little bit about each item to encourage families to use them at home. Children were then called up one by one to get their bag. They were so excited, and rushed back over to their parent or grandparents to show them what was inside.

So that our pre-schoolers felt involved too, we managed to source some picture books to gift to each of them. It was fantastic to watch all the children looking at their bags or books and many parents and grandparents started to read the stories with their children. We’ve had really positive feedback from parents following the event. One parent told us that she and her daughter enjoy singing the songs and rhymes at

home. They now take turns to tell the story, which has made reading at home more fun.

Veronica Vasquez, Clackmannanshire

When we gifted the Bookbug Explorer Bag, the children were involved right from the start. We read the three books several times before the gifting event and planned activities and play opportunities based on the books. One of the books was *The Something*, a story about a little boy who finds a mysterious hole in his garden. Digging our own hole in the nursery garden enabled the children to talk about what could be down there. They could put their hands inside and feel the start of a tunnel, which sparked many conversations and suggestions including dragons and other creatures!

Having attended Bookbug Explorer Bag training, we were very keen to involve parents in our gifting event and invited them to join us for the last 45 minutes of our nursery session. To encourage as many as possible to attend, the invitations were personalised and came from the children themselves. The key information was printed by staff, and then children drew a picture for their parents, inspired by the books and activities we had been exploring. We had also discussed the gifting event with the children, which really built their excitement. When they took the invitations home, they were able to tell their family all about the event; what was planned and why they should come. Children were keen to tell their parents about the books, the gift they were going to get, as well as the fact that drinks and biscuits would be available. It's hard to say no to such enthusiasm and there was a great turnout on the day. Some parents could not attend, but other family members came in their place.

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Our gifting event was for all the ante-preschool children and their families. We planned outdoor games and activities for the pre-school children whilst the gifting event was taking place.

On the day, we set up a large area with cushions to make a comfortable space to welcome everyone in. Whilst parents were arriving, we played a few circle games. Once everyone was ready, we explained what we had planned and then we read the stories to the children and their families. Afterwards, we spent time talking about each story and asking children questions, to allow parents to see how familiar their children had become with them and how much they enjoyed listening to stories. Afterwards, the bags were gifted to each child. Time was spent exploring the bags and we took out each item to ensure that parents knew what was in the bag and why. We linked the items in the bag to ideas for using them, for example we suggested that the children could draw on the postcards and then parents could take their child to post the card to a relative or friend. It was also an opportunity to discuss the benefits of books and stories, and to encourage families to read the books in the bag again and again at home.

Feedback from families was really positive both during and following the event. One grandparent came in to show the staff the postcard she had received from her grandchild, with a picture and a message written by the child's parent about how much the books were being enjoyed at home. Parents also told us that the Bookbug Explorer CD was popular and enabled younger siblings to join in with songs and rhymes at home.

The gifting event was a great way to engage with parents. They were able to see how much their children enjoy the experience of sharing a story and could share their child's joy in receiving the gift of a Bookbug Explorer Bag.

Do you have a story to share? We would love to hear from you! Email bookbug@scottishbooktrust.com and we will be in touch to find out more.