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Animal Activities! : A Children's Book for Vocabulary Intervention

Chloey DiBartolo
chloeyd@bgsu.edu

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Chloey DiBartolo

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Animal Activities! : A Children's Book for Vocabulary Intervention

Introduction

The two fields of English and Communication Sciences and Disorders can be unified through the format of a children's book. Children's books present abundant opportunities to increase a child's language skills, both expressively and receptively through shared book reading with an adult. Cloze structures can be added throughout the book to aid in this. Cloze structures "are similar to a written language 'fill-in the blank' task in which an utterance is begun by an adult and completed by the child" (Bellon-Harn et al., 2004). They are strategies where an adult can read to a child and the adult will pause to elicit a particular vocabulary word from the child to complete an utterance. This technique, along with shared book reading can potentially provide a beneficial opportunity to aid in increasing the language abilities of a child who experiences a language delay or language disorder, specifically their semantic skills (increasing their vocabulary).

By using elements from the two fields of English and Communication Sciences and Disorders, I was able to merge concepts from each in a beneficial way for my Honors Project. As for the field of English, I constructed a children's book. Children's books are a genre of literature that encompass both writing and illustrations in a format to appeal to and entertain young children (Fadiman, 2017). They are intended for an audience who is young in age and are usually stories that are not difficult to read (Fadiman, 2017). As for the field of Communication Sciences

and Disorders, the book is intended as a therapy tool for children who have a language delay or language disorder. The field of Communication Sciences and Disorders, or Speech-Language Pathology, has a focus to “prevent, assess, diagnose, and treat speech, language, social communication, cognitive-communication, and swallowing disorders in children and adults” (ASHA, n.d.). Children who have a language delay may have slower vocabulary acquisition, fall below language expectations for their age, and may be referenced as a ‘late talker’ (ASHA Practice Portal, n.d.). Children with language disorders may have trouble understanding (receptive language disorder) or they may have troubles with talking (expressive language disorder) and a speech-language pathologist may work with the child on using their words or another form of communication to get their thoughts across and improving their understanding (ASHA, n.d.).

For my honors project, I have written and illustrated a children’s book intended to be used as a therapy tool for preschool age children (3-5 years old) who have a language delay or language disorder. When crafting an idea for my honors project, I was drawn to the creative route and constructing a children’s book. My preliminary research question was: how could I create a children’s book that was related to the field of communication disorders? I then further developed the question: how can shared book reading be beneficial to children in their language development? Finally, I was then interested in further researching: how can cloze structures be used within a children’s book to help children with a language delay or language disorder? Therefore, when conducting research for the project, the guiding research questions encompassed four main topics: children’s books, language delay and language disorders, cloze structures, and shared book reading.

Literature Review

The research I have conducted has broadened my understanding of the fields of both Communication Disorders and English, and specifically within English, children's literature. In terms of shared book reading, there is a positive relationship between the frequency of shared book reading and the child's expressive vocabulary (Sénéchal et al., 2008). In addition, simple repetition and elaborated repetition of new words during shared book reading are successful receptive word learning techniques (O'Fallon et al., 2020). This indicates that interactive shared book reading techniques can help to increase a child's semantic knowledge. Shared book reading has also been known to help children with developmental language disorder (DLD) produce more verbal utterances, be more self-confident in their communicative abilities, and be more talkative during family conversations (Lavelli et al., 2019).

Cloze structures used by an adult during shared book reading have been found to help aid in language skills for children with a language delay. Expansions of a child's utterances used with cloze procedures during shared book reading resulted in the child producing more interpretations about a book's characters (Bradshaw et al., 1998). This indicates that cloze procedures can be an effective way to help elicit expressive language for children with a language delay. In addition, pausing before target vocabulary words during shared book reading helps children remember the target words more, attend to the words more, and invites the children to engage in the book reading to make a prediction of the word (Read et al., 2019). Therefore, cloze procedures are an effective way to engage the child in the book reading experience and provide the opportunity for them to express their thoughts. Cloze procedures also can increase a child's semantic complexity of their utterances as an outcome of being prompted by a cloze procedure, and therefore can aid in their semantic development (Bellon-Harn et al., 2004).

Researching the techniques of writing a children's book has also helped me tremendously in preparation for my honors project and has allowed me a greater understanding of the style and design of a children's book. For instance, color can be used to highlight different parts of a story and evoke emotion, the book needs to unify the images and text on the pages so it is aesthetically pleasing for the reader to look at, and lines in a children's book help readers navigate through the pages and can be a variety of shapes and thicknesses for different uses (Giorgis, 1999). Lines can also be used to show different emotions or activities such as running (Brunetti, 2019). In addition, texture can be implemented in an illustration to highlight the surface of an object or shape (Horning, 2010). The material of a children's book reflects whether the author had the children's needs in mind, such as a size that can be easily held by their smaller hands, a cover that is durable, and pages that can be turned easily (Walker, 2012). Other key points Walker (2012) made were that illustrations are integral to children's books, and a topic is constrained to either one page or a double page spread. In addition, the content, size of the type, and number of pictures are determined based on the reading age of the children (Walker, 2012). Finally, close line spacing may be difficult for children as they read (Walker, 2012).

Methods

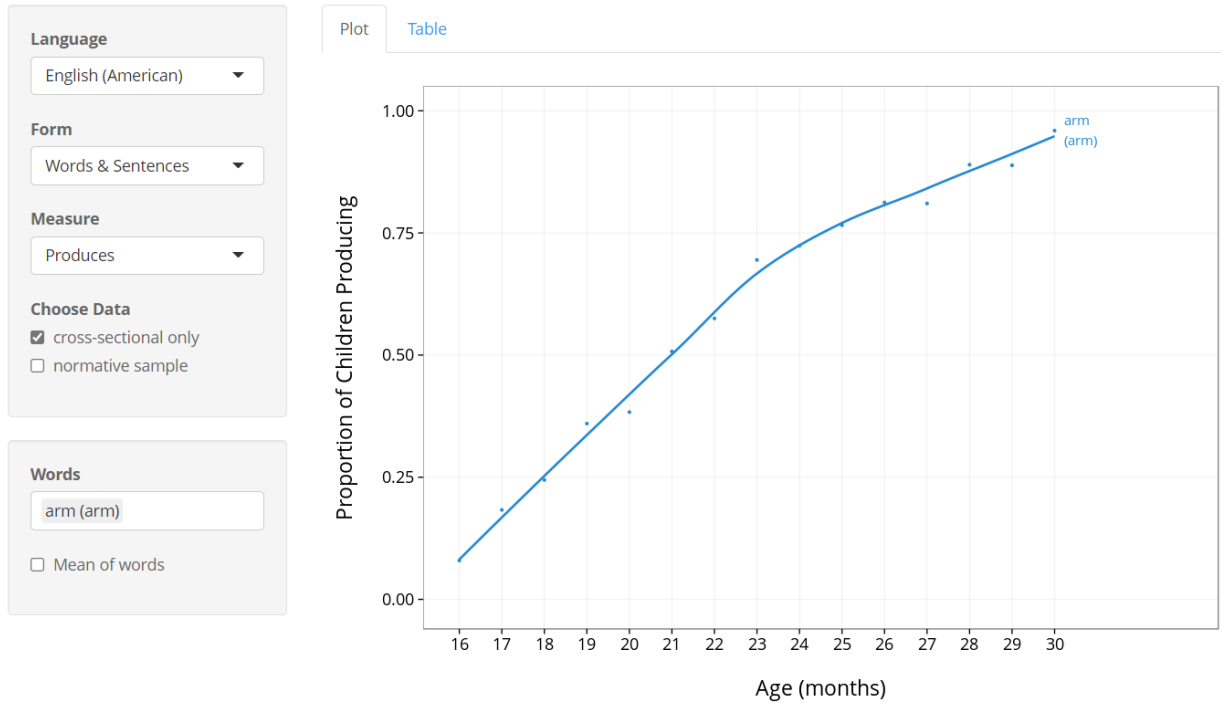
To begin my honors project, I spent the fall semester of 2021 researching scholarly articles to gain more information on cloze structures and how they can be helpful to someone with a language disorder or language delay. I also researched the benefits of shared book reading, along with the different important elements that make up a children's book. As I was gathering important and helpful information that aided in expanding my knowledge for my honors project, I created an annotated bibliography of 15 different research articles.

From then, I needed to plan how I was going to structure my children's book and implement the cloze structures throughout it. I discovered that most children's books are 32 pages in length (Vitale, 2020) and then decided to create 24 pages (or 12 spreads) of content with additional front and back matter. From there, I decided to choose 12 target vocabulary words to use throughout the book with the cloze structures, each one being on a double-page spread. I wanted to be strategic in choosing the vocabulary words, so I used data from Wordbank, an online database, and used all available forms in North American English (Frank et al., 2016). Data were downloaded between 1/20/2022-2/18/2022. Wordbank uses caregiver-reported data from the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (CDI) which is a checklist parents and caregivers complete in documenting a child's early language abilities and can be used by clinicians and researchers to understand a child's language development (Fenson et al., 2007; Frank et al., 2016). I specifically looked at the version of the MacArthur-Bates CDI titled Words and Sentences and focused on the first part of it which was vocabulary production of children 16-30 months in age (Fenson et al., 2007). I analyzed data from that database to first find words from over 600 words that were not very common for children to say at 16 months, and that were also common for children to say at 30 months. This process excluded words that a high proportion of children were using at 16 months that a child with a language delay may have already acquired. It also targeted words at 30 months that many children are using and are most likely functional words that are being used in everyday life. A child with a language delay or language disorder may not have these words yet in their vocabulary. The trend from 16 to 30 months was shown by a positive slope trend on the database graph (see Figure 1). A positive slope indicated that as the age in months increased from 16 to 30 months, the proportion of

children producing a certain word also increased. Figure 1 below shows an example of this trend for one of the target vocabulary words ‘arm’:

Figure 1

Example of Wordbank



Note. Trajectory of the word ‘arm’ from 16 to 30 months

This data analysis resulted in 269 words that fit the positive slope trend. From there, I found the exact slope of the line for the 269 words from 16 to 30 months, and chose the 12 words with the steepest slope as my target vocabulary words for my book.

I decided to use animals for the illustrations in my book as they can be engaging to children, and each of the 12 I chose were words in the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (CDI) and fit the positive production trend from 16 to 30 months as well. From there, I crafted 12 sentences for my book with the target vocabulary word at the end of

each sentence for the cloze structure. For instance, one sentence reads, “What is the frog going to do today? The frog needs to get to the other side of the pond. Hop-hop. To get to the next lily pad, he needs to j__” and the child would say the word “jump” when the adult pauses at the indicated blank spot. Another example of a sentence from the book is, “The ant wants to color a pretty picture. She gets a piece of paper and a yellow cr__” with the target vocabulary word being ‘crayon’. Parts of speech also needed to be considered when writing the sentences. Cloze structures were easier to create for nouns because the target vocabulary word in the cloze structure is at the end of the sentence. This follows the typical English word order of subject + verb + object, where the noun is the object at the end of the sentence. Target vocabulary words that were verbs were harder to construct a cloze structure for because the typical word order does not have verbs at the end of sentences. In addition, I used the editor tool in Microsoft Word to check the readability level of my sentences and ensured the readability level was 2.0 or under for grade level so it was not too high. I also reduced the syntactic complexity of my sentences for a younger audience while still using a sentence form that worked well in the cloze structure.

I chose to write the cloze structure with either one or two letters followed by a blank space for the target word at the end of each sentence. Using only certain letters from the word is one of the multiple ways to format cloze structures and help with semantic (vocabulary) cueing (Johnson, 2014). I decided to use this format to provide some information in case the target word was not clear to the adult, and in attempts to publish the book, some form of a flap to cover the target word may not have been feasible. The target vocabulary words that the child will produce are prompted by the cloze structure and also through the illustration of the word in the book.

I then laid out the 12 double-page spreads for my book and drew a rough sketch of what I wanted each page to look like and where the illustrations and words would be located on each

page. Next, I drew the illustrations for the book on regular paper, scanned and uploaded them as PDF files, and typed the words over the PDF files in order to have clear and clean sentences for each page.

Results

I have learned a wide array of knowledge about the two fields of English and Communication Sciences and Disorders from my honors project. I have learned more about what cloze structures are and how they can be used as a helpful tool in eliciting language from a child and help to grow one's vocabulary. I learned more about the importance of shared book reading as well and how beneficial it can be in increasing language for a child who has a language disorder or language delay. I also learned more about the specific elements that encompass a children's book and how they may vary depending on the context of the story.

In summary, I have created a children's book of 32 pages titled *Animal Activities!*, with 24 pages of story content made up of the 12 double-paged spreads (See Appendix A). I have illustrated each page and have written sentences that include cloze structures for 12 target vocabulary words. Using cloze structures throughout my book can help to increase children's expressive language abilities and semantic development (Bradshaw, Hoffman, & Norris, 1998). I have uploaded the finished illustrated pages and put them together in an online format to make a cohesive book. I hope to soon publish my children's book and have a physical copy of it as well to one day use as a speech-language pathologist.

Implications

My children's book is designed to be used as a therapy tool for children who have a language delay or language disorder. It can be used by a speech-language pathologist in therapy

through shared book reading and can aid in increasing the child's semantic skills and overall language abilities. I hope to one day use my children's book in therapy as a speech-language pathologist as well. In addition, parents could use this book with their children to allow them another opportunity to increase their vocabulary and other language skills through shared book reading.

The research I have conducted for selecting the 12 target vocabulary words as well can potentially be presented at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association convention to other students and professionals in the field of speech-language pathology.

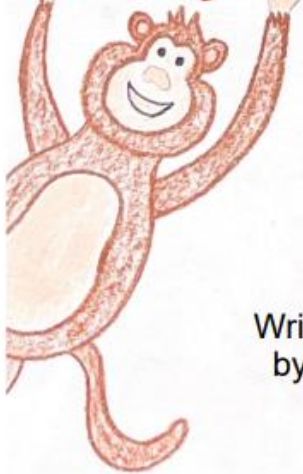
Appendix A

Animal Activities!



Animal

Activities!



Written and Illustrated
by Chloey DiBartolo



To my amazing future clients!

A note to the reader: This book is designed to be read by an adult with a child to aid in vocabulary development. The target vocabulary words are indicated with one or two letters followed by a blank space. The adult will read the sentence, verbally drawing out the length of the word before the blank space, and then pause to prompt the child to say the target vocabulary word. The adult may also point to the illustrations to provide context clues and further engage the child in the shared reading experience.

Animal Activities!



Written and Illustrated by
Chloey DiBartolo

What is the giraffe going to do today?



The giraffe wants to play outside but it is raining. Drip-drop.



She uses an umbrella to protect herself from the r___.



What is the lion going to do today?

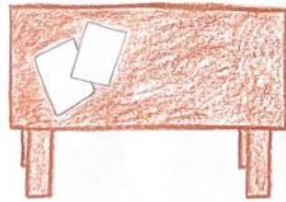


The lion loves to choose his outfits.

He picks out a shirt and p___.



What is the ant going to do today?



The ant wants to color a pretty picture.



She gets a piece of paper and a yellow cr_____.

What is the tiger going to do today?



The tiger plays tag with his sister and
knocks over a vase. Uh oh!



Now the vase is br_____.

What is the chicken going to do today?



The chicken is going to play hopscotch!

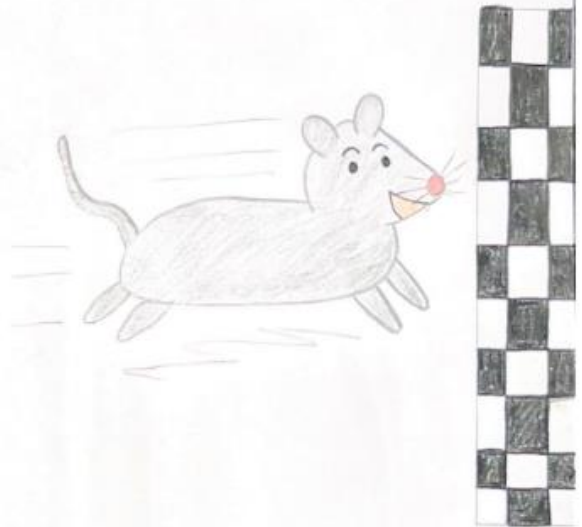


To hop between the squares, she needs to balance on one l__.

What is the mouse going to do today?



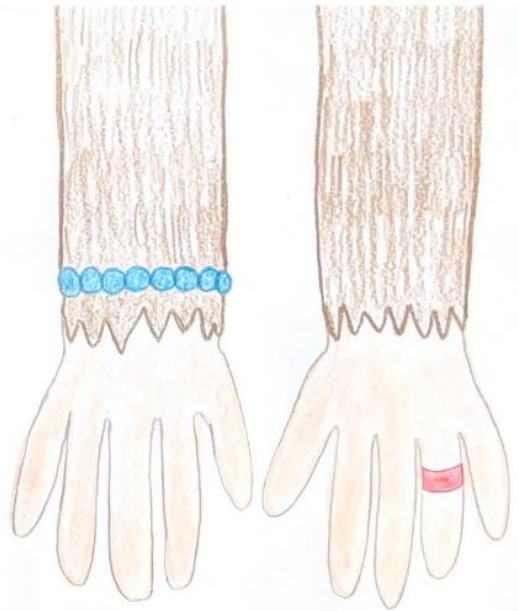
The mouse is going to race with some friends at recess. Zoooom.



To win, the mouse must quickly r___.

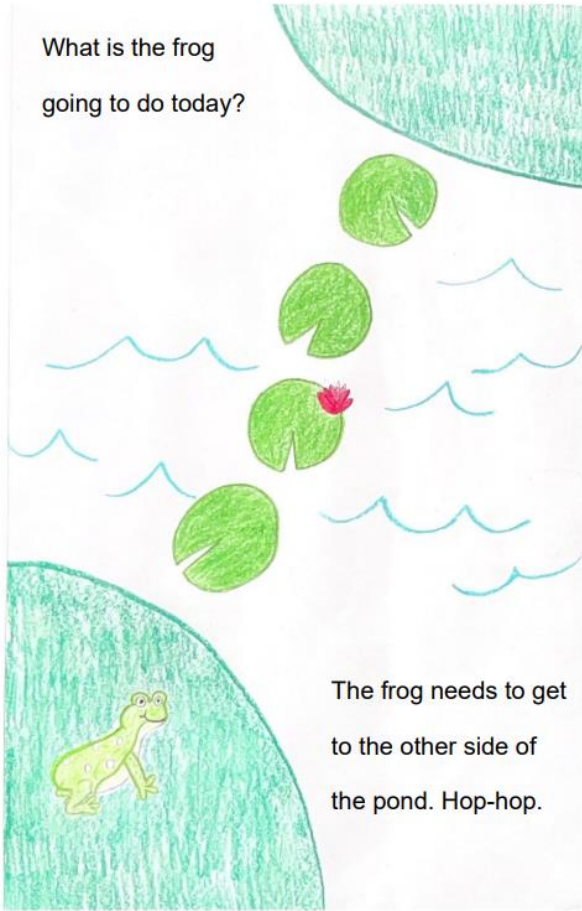
What is the monkey going to do today?

The monkey puts some jewelry on.

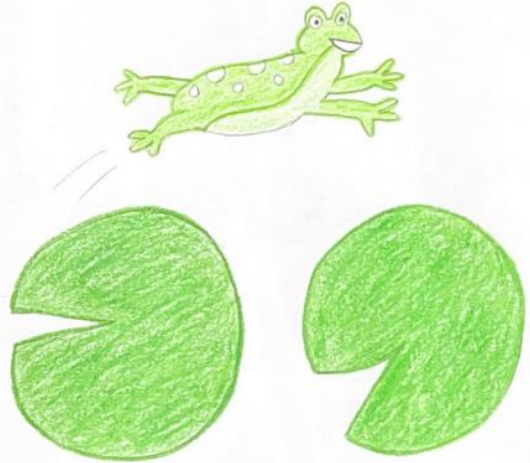


She wears a blue bracelet on her wrist,
and a red ring on her f_____.

What is the frog
going to do today?



The frog needs to get
to the other side of
the pond. Hop-hop.



To get to the next lily pad, he
needs to j___.

What is the butterfly going to do today?



The butterfly is sad that her grandma must go back home after visiting for the day. Sniffle.



Her eyes fill with tears and she and cr___.

What is the elephant going to do today?

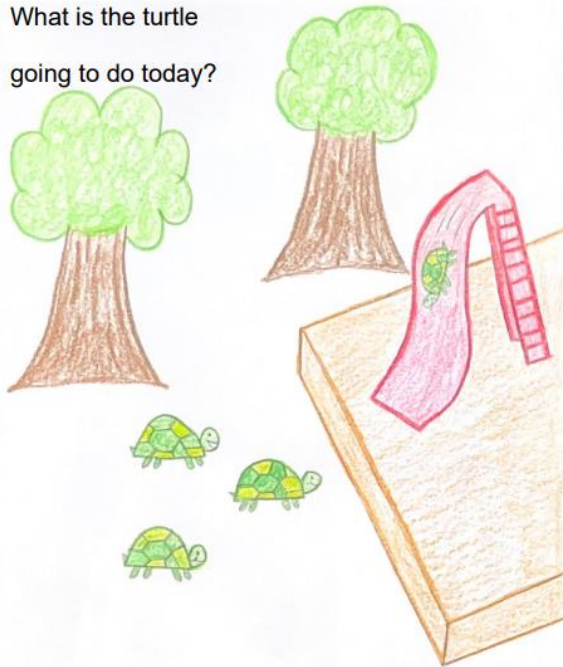


The elephant runs around with his friends as they play soccer.



He trips over the ball and fa_____.

What is the turtle
going to do today?



The turtle likes to go to the park with
his family. Wee!

On the playground, he likes to pl____.



What is the sheep going to do today?



The monkey falls down while he is running
and gets a scratch. Ouch!

The sheep puts a band aid on the
monkey's a__.

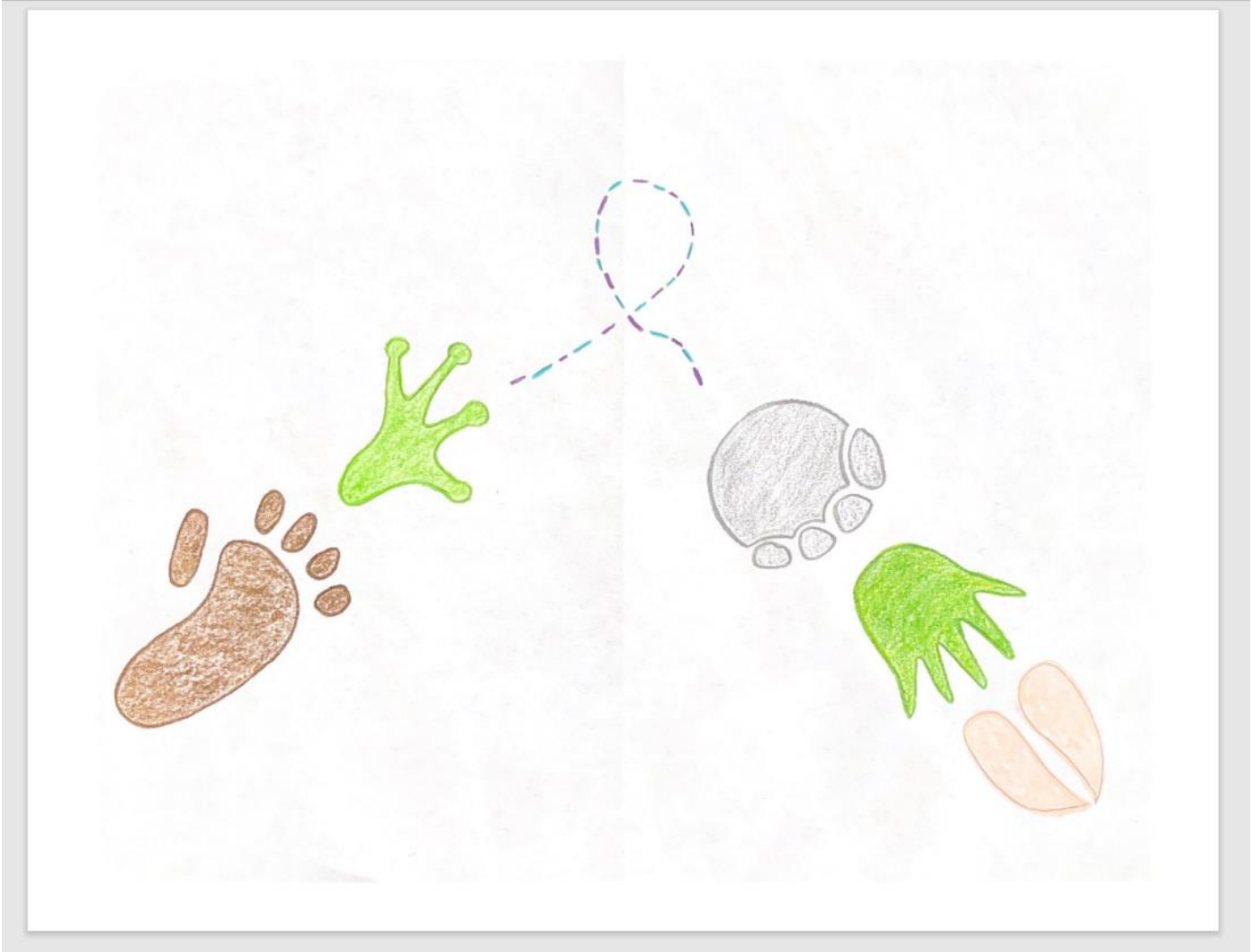


Author's Note

This book was made as an Honors Project at Bowling Green State University. It is designed as a therapy tool for preschool children with a language delay or a language disorder, and can be used to aid in vocabulary development. Cloze structures are used on each spread of the book, and these are finished with a blank space to elicit a particular important target vocabulary word from the child. Thank you for reading!

Target Vocabulary Words

1. Rain
2. Pants
3. Crayon
4. Broken
5. Leg
6. Run
7. Finger
8. Jump
9. Cries
10. Falls
11. Play
12. Arm





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