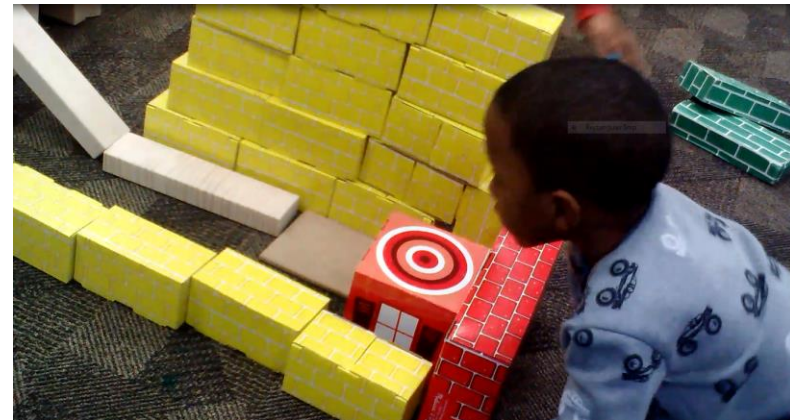


# Block Play: Building a Foundation of Early Learning in the Library



## Objectives

- Understand how block play contributes to early childhood development
- Key elements to develop block play in the library
- Ideas to support and sustain block play throughout the community





## Creating an Elevator Speech

Using value-based language to advocate for library services to children & families



Successful elevator speeches use value-based language to allow you to advocate for the transformative services the library offers children and families every day. Start building your own strong elevator speech with this template, where you replace the bracketed sections with the specific patron group, program, and outcome you want to tout:

"I help [target audience\*]

[verb phrase\*] at the library so that

[proven/expected positive outcome for target audience\*]."



# How can I support my child during block play?

- Show interest in what your child is doing.
- Ask open-ended questions: "Tell me about your structure." "I wonder how big we can build this tower." "What kinds of animals live in your zoo?" "What does the rest of the town look like?"
- Ask your child how many blocks they have used so far and how many they plan to use. Count them together.
- Ask how many blocks they think it would take to build all the way to the wall.
- Talk about shapes of blocks. Name them and compare them.
- Build ramps and test them with cars and trucks.
- Talk about people who might live in the structure. What do they do and why do they live there?
- Ask what else could be added to the structure.
- Volunteer to write down the story of your child's structure using their words.
- Use your phone to take photos of what they build.
- Compare what they are building to buildings you have seen in real life.
- Have fun!



Find free block play events and more information at [piercecountylibrary.org](http://piercecountylibrary.org)  
search site: block play



# BLOCK PLAY

Children **LOVE** building with blocks!



Pierce County Library System



Allen County  
Public Library



Pierce County  
Library System

Information & Imagination

[piercecountylibrary.org](http://piercecountylibrary.org)  
253-548-3424

Photos by  
Maria Dedicataria  
and PCLS Staff

To request this document in an alternate format,  
call 253-548-3426, or Washington Relay TTY 711.

3/15 (2M)



# Learning happens during block play!

Having researched the benefits of block play, Pierce County Library System invested in sets of blocks for every library. The low-pile carpets and wide-open spaces create perfect places for building. We chose large wooden unit blocks that are satisfying to hold, relate perfectly to one another and are very durable.

## What are children learning when they build with blocks?

### Math

As children build, they count blocks, use them to measure distances, create patterns and name the shapes. These are math concepts young children need to learn.



### Literacy

Children talk about what they are building using descriptive words. This develops their vocabulary. They see labels on the cabinet with block names, adding more vocabulary. Children may create signs for their building, practicing writing. We also add books to the block area for inspiration and even more literacy learning.

### Science

Children explore the blocks' qualities: texture, size and smell. They use the blocks to explore balance, gravity and weight. When animals are added, children may build habitats and talk about them (more vocabulary).



### Social Studies

With encouragement, children build what they see in the world. When people and neighborhood signs are added, children explore how people live and work. They build roads and neighborhoods, which is a young child's way of mapping.



### Social Emotional Development

When children build together, they must give and take. If they build on their own near other children, they must learn to share the blocks. Cleaning up after play is a wonderful lesson in taking care of oneself.



### Technology

Through block building, children explore stability, ramps, roads and bridges. They may add pulleys, levers, mirrors and tubes for additional experimentation.

## Seven Stages of Block Play

All children move through the stages in this order. Once each stage is mastered, children move backward and forward through them. Ages two and up may skip the first carrying stage.

### 1. Carrying

Toddlers love to carry, move, touch, hold, drop and feel blocks, exploring their properties. They like a variety of containers in which to pack, repack and haul blocks.

### 2. Stacking

This involves both vertical (towers) and horizontal (roads) stacking.

### 3. Bridges

Children begin to use blocks to create bridges of all sorts.

### 4. Enclosures

These may be filled in with blocks—a 'sea' of blocks—or they may be open in the middle.

### 5. Patterns and Symmetry

Children become more sophisticated in their building, creating patterns or structures balanced on both sides.

### 6. Early Representational

Children begin to build structures to use them in play. For example, a child creates a zoo out of blocks to house animals they use for imaginary play.

### 7. Later Representational

This stage is generally reserved for older children. The structures that are built during this stage are often quite elaborate and sophisticated.





# Children and Childcare in Allen County

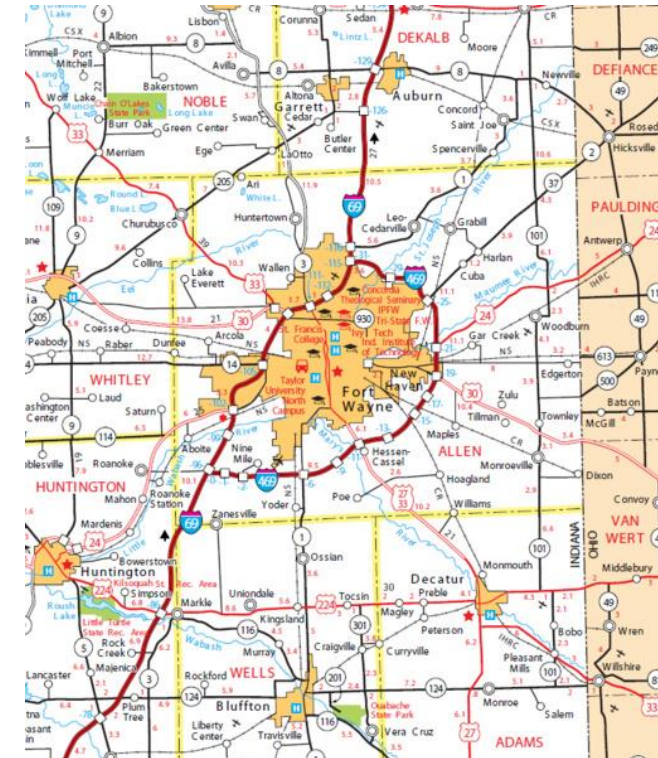
To improve outcomes for children in Allen County

21% of our children live in poverty

51% of African-American children

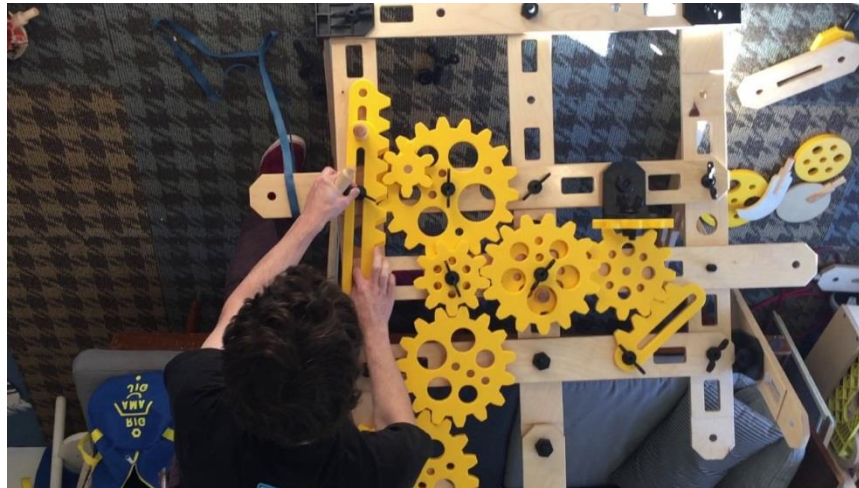
37% of Latino Children

13% White



To provide low-income children, especially those attending lower quality childcare programs, with the opportunity to learn from and play with interesting, high quality blocks.

To increase library staff's and care-providers' ability to facilitate block play.







## Inspiring Great Futures

PNC Grow Up Great® helps children from birth through age five develop a passion for learning that lasts a lifetime – and can help set them on a path to success.

LEARN MORE



SHARE



RESOURCES

Explore our New Digital Storybooks



IMPACT

Our Pre-K Alliance with DonorsChoose.org



## ECA SERVES COMMUNITIES



Early Childhood Alliance partners with businesses and organizations, providing support and resources about quality early childhood education.

Early Childhood Alliance is also available to consult with businesses that are in need of solutions for employees with child care issues.



## MISSION



To build better futures for young children by promoting and providing quality early childhood education and services for families, early childhood professionals and the community

## VISION



For every young child to succeed and for families to be self-sufficient as a result of quality early care and education.



Contact us to receive our community newsletter or parent e-newsletter.

## Building Better Futures for Children

Early Childhood Alliance depends on the generosity of the community for volunteers and financial support. Call us to learn more about giving opportunities.

We welcome your comments or questions about our services, or career and volunteer opportunities.

Early Childhood Alliance, a not-for-profit organization, is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer and service provider.



■ (260) 746-2501  
■ (800) 423-1498  
■ [ECAAlliance.org](http://ECAAlliance.org)

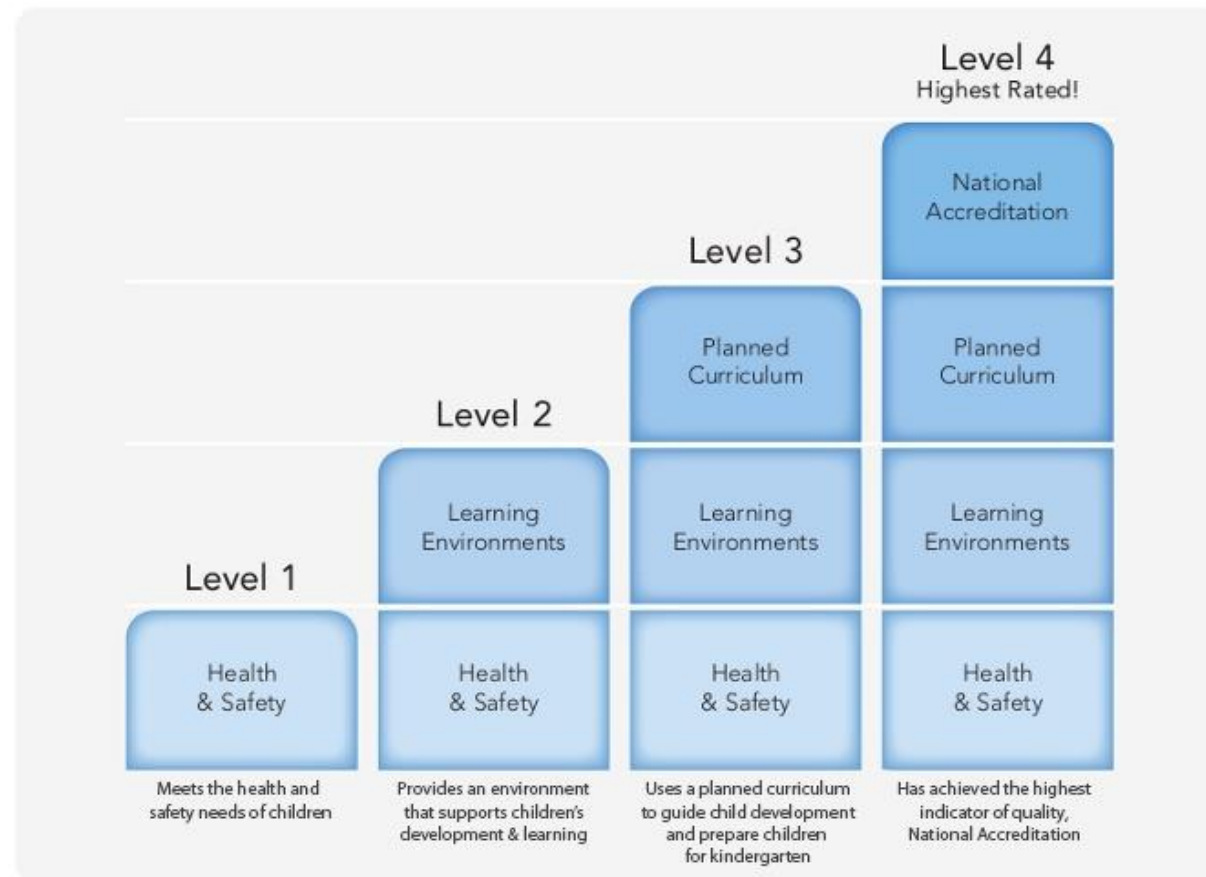


Building Better Futures for Children

# Partnership: The Early Childhood Alliance

Organization in Allen County working on improving the quality of and access to childcare

Creators of Paths To Quality, state-wide quality assessment program







Allen County  
Public Library

+



+



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Allen County  
Public Library

# LET'S PLAY

- What?** Playing with blocks — all kinds of blocks!
- Who?** Your staff & your 3-5 year olds
- Where?** A near-by branch of Allen County Public Library
- When?** Play begins week of September 18th, 10:00 am, lasting for one hour, for four weeks.
- Why?** Block play helps kids develop early literacy, spatial, and social skills. Plus it's fun!
- How?** We provide transportation, training, and blocks.
- And?** Your staff who will be using the blocks with the children attends one training, on September 14th, 6:30 pm at Pontiac Branch and four play times. Your site will get a starter set of blocks worth \$50-\$100.

Questions? Call Pamela Martin-Diaz at  
Shawnee Branch Library 260-421-1355  
or email [pmartin@acpl.info](mailto:pmartin@acpl.info) or your ECA  
coach.







# Block play touches on all of the different areas of early childhood

## Math:

Counting, 1:1, shapes and colors, sorting and matching, measurement, estimation, addition/subtraction, equality

## Science:

gravity, weight, force, patterns, solve problem, cause/effect, parts to whole; prediction and observation

## Literacy/language:

speak, listen, vocabulary, themes and stories

## Social/emotional:

cooperation, exploration, decision-making, respect for each other's work, make choices, taking turns, sharing

## Motor:

eye-hand coordination, strength, fine motor skills



# Math:

Counting – How many do we have here?

1:1 – Cool! Each of us has one block. One block, one person.

Shapes – This must be a triangle because they always have 3 sides!

Colors – Which is your favorite? Why?

Sorting and matching – Let's put all of the squares that are the same size together.

Measurement – Let's see which one is the tallest. I wonder if they have the same number of blocks.

Estimation – I am guessing, or estimating, that there are 8 blocks here.

Addition/subtraction – How many will there be if we add one more?

Equality – Let's see if we have the same number of blocks. Are the piles equal?

# Science:

Gravity – Which one will roll the farthest?

Weight – I wonder if the heavier one will go farther than the lighter one.

Force – What do you think about using this block to move this one?

Patterns – Wow! I love how the colors you used repeat. Red, blue, red. It's a pattern!

Solve problem – What do you think we can do so this doesn't happen again?

Cause/effect – What did you do to make it fall down?

Parts to whole -- How many more pieces do we need to complete this?

Prediction and observation – What do you think will happen? Have you observed or seen this happen before?

# Literacy/language:

Speak and listen – That's an interesting idea.

Vocabulary – The turret on this castle looks as though it might topple!

Themes and stories – Let's play the Three Billy Goats Gruff!



# Social/emotional:

Cooperation – I like how you are sharing the blocks you don't need!

Exploration – What could we do differently?

Decision-making – Which way do you want this to go?

Respect for each other's work – How do you feel when someone knocks down your creation?

Making choices – Which ones should we play with today?

Taking turns – Who picks next?

Sharing – Maybe it would be more fun to work on this together.

# Motor:

Eye-hand coordination – It looks like it might be difficult to place this one!

Strength – Let's see how many we can carry at a time.

Fine motor skills – Let's put all of the little ones over here.

**Stage 1:** Discovering Blocks – they are carried but not used for construction





## Stage 2: Stacking Blocks



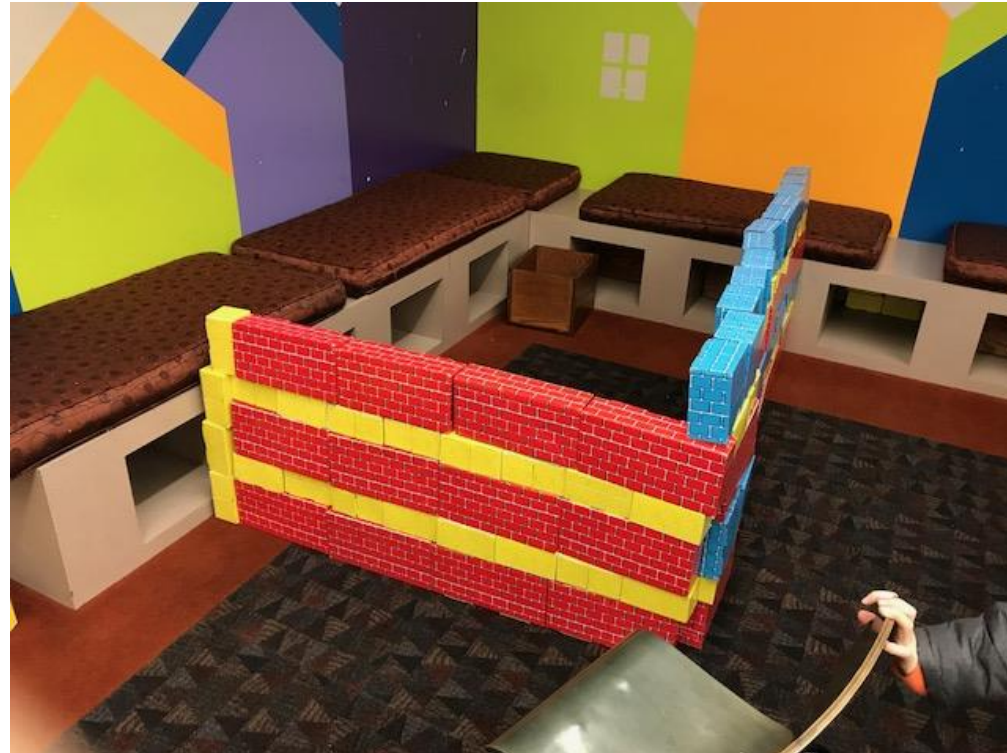
Vertically or horizontally. There is repetition and early patterns.

### **Stage 3:** Complex Stacking or bridging

They create bridges, using two blocks to support a third.



## Stage 4: Making Enclosures





## Stage 5: Building with Patterns and Symmetry



## Stage 6: Early representational



## Stage 7: Later representational





## Block Play Essential Element – Observation

“What we see children do from the outside helps us to ask questions about what children are thinking, feeling, and experiencing on the inside.”



# Prompts and Questions

- Ask open-ended questions (questions that can not be answered yes or no) *What's going on here?*
- Ask follow up questions, repeating what the child said. *You are building a tower. How high will it go?*
- Wait for the child to respond (five seconds!) (one, two, three, four, five)
- Show interest in each response. *You have really planned this!*



# What we learned







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*Oh my goodness!*

*We had no  
idea...*

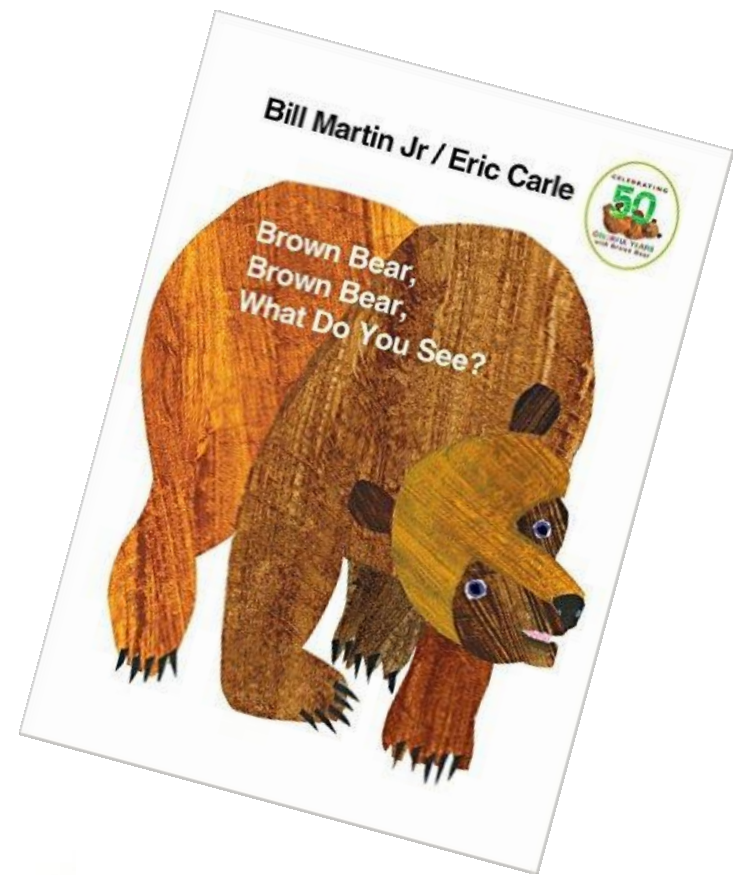
This literally  
**SURPRISE!**  
changes  
everything.

# This still looks like fun!

## What do we do now?



# Take it all to them...



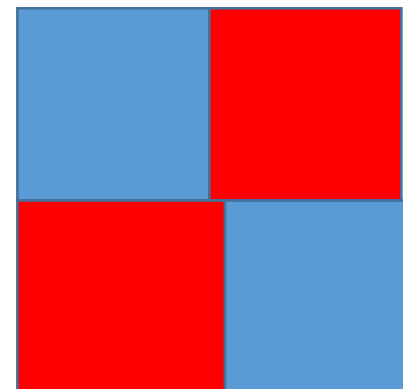
But we don't have any

**MONEY!**



# A little bit of money and a lot of imagination!?

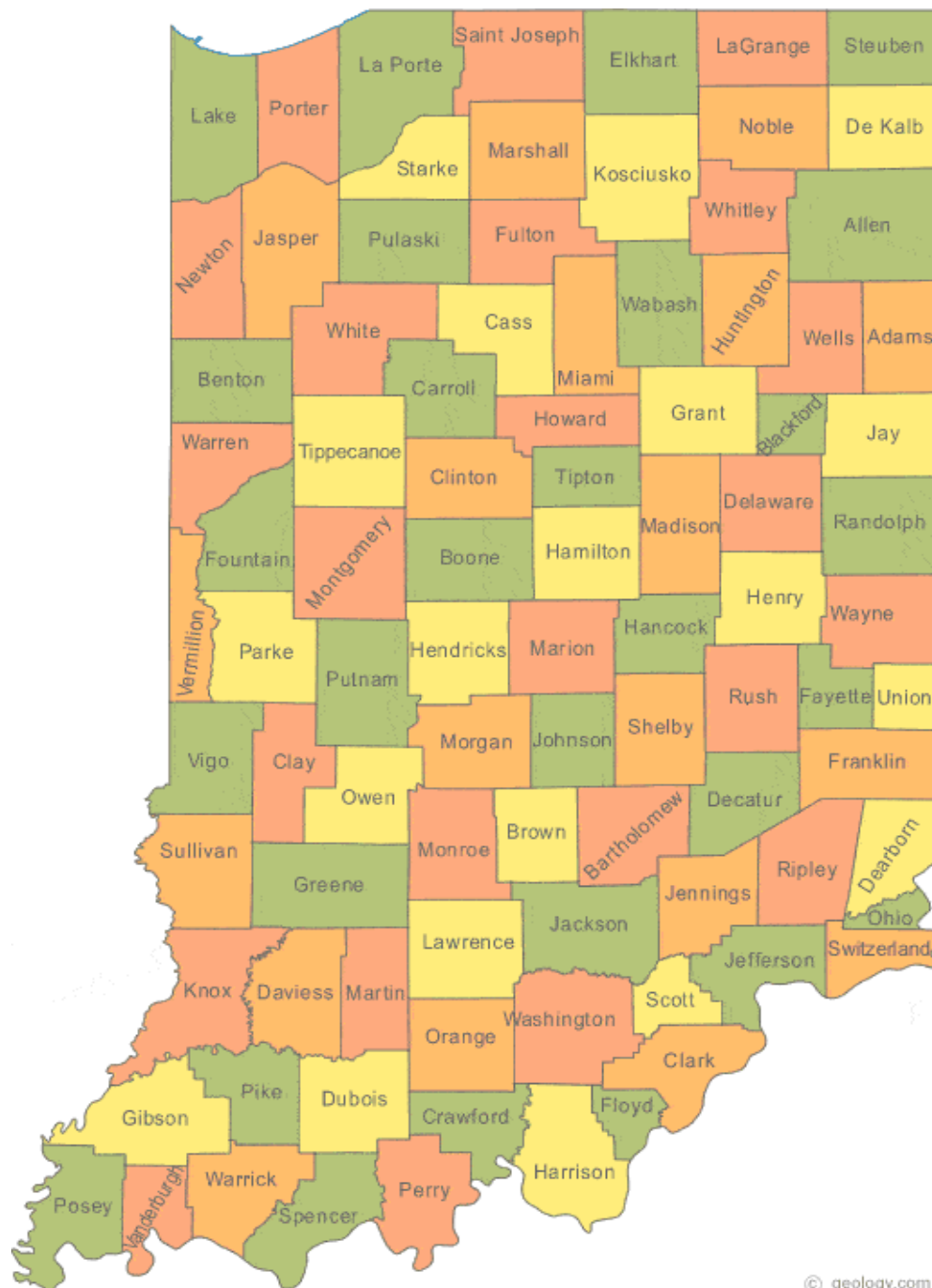









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**BLOCK PLAY IS AMAZING**

**AND WILL MAKE YOUR  
LIBRARY EVEN BETTER**

Sp Adobe Spark



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# Family Engagement in Block Play

time SPENT  
PLAYING  
WITH CHILDREN  
IS  
NEVER  
WASTED

-DAWN LANTERO



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Public Library



Time flies when you are  
having fun,

and even cleaning up  
isn't so bad.





# Making Space for Play





# Destination library



# What to buy?



Cardboard Blocks



Jumbo Blocks



Tower Blocks



Light and Color Tabletop Blocks



Magnatiles



Duplos



MegaBlocks





Basic Wood Blocks



Loose Parts  
from Kodo



Tree Blocks



Keva Planks



Tegu Magnetic Blocks





Community Playthings  
Unit Blocks



Rigamajig and  
Rigamajig Jr




Blocks and Ramps  
from Kodo



Big and Medium  
Blue Blocks from  
Imagination  
Playground





Good times  
are never ending  
when you are  
playing and  
pretending