



## Keys to an Imaginary Land



*Often rich imaginary play starts with a simple prop. Help encourage children's imagination and pretending.*

### **Learning Goals Children are working on:**

- Developing Imagination
- Language Skills
- Creativity
- Literacy

Here's a way to encourage child-directed play just by introducing a new prop to your housekeeping area. Use this strategy anytime, in any area of your classroom.

### **Materials:**

- An old key on a ring. A larger key cut out of cardboard decorated in a way that catches children's attention.

### **Directions:**

- Place the key somewhere in the area so that it is quickly visible to the children who select that area during free play.
- Watch what children do. They may begin by exploring it; then, they are ready to play.
- To facilitate the play, you could say something like: "You could pretend that the key opens doors to an imaginary land. I wonder what it would look like."
- Let the children pretend to open the door.
- Ask questions like: "What do you see in this land? What does it look like? Who lives here? What are they doing? What is this place called?"
- If the children start to turn this into a "scary place", you could re-direct them by saying something like: "Oh, this is what I see." Point out pretend things that shift their focus.
- Once they have established who lives there, suggest that they take on roles of those characters. Continue to help the children imagine and build out their ideas until they can take over the play on their own.
- The more they do, the more child-directed the play becomes. All you may need to do is occasionally offer guiding suggestions or questions.
- Later, you might extend the play by suggesting that children draw what the imaginary land looks like. You could record their remarks and attach them to their artwork. Now, you've moved pretend play into a literacy activity as well.

 *Strategy Song: When you pretend, you can do anything.*

