



Our Reviewers

It sounds straightforward: Simple stories, reinforced with visual learning strategies, designed to help young children learn the skills they need to prepare for school and enjoy happy, productive lives. Yet each layout—each word—requires an astonishing amount of thought and consideration. Simple stories, yes, but such important lessons.

The children at **Ready Set Pre-K—Freda, Percy, Emma, Carlos, Camille and Ajay**—live in an idealized world, but their stories must resonate with children in the real world.

To help us strike the right balance between showing behaviors designed to be modeled and presenting real-life stories, we asked five experts in early childhood development and education to serve as the **I See I Learn** review team: **Nita Copley, Jessica Hoffmann-Davis, Louise Belmont-Skinner, Cindy Gennarelli and Maurice Sykes.**

Their insights have been invaluable. They have become so familiar with our fictional friends, their responses often include comments such as, “That doesn’t sound like Freda!” “What would Ajay do?” And “Oh that Percy!”

Likewise, tales of some of the many real children the reviewers have known—their foibles, humor, and the uncanny ability of the very young to cut to the chase—have helped give the **I See I Learn** stories a sense of grounding.

On behalf of Freda, Percy, Emma, Ajay, Camille, Carlos, Miss Cathy and, of course, Pickle, thank you!

Stuart

NITA COPLEY

Chair of the Curriculum and Instruction Department,
College of Education, University of Houston, Houston, Texas

Tell us a little bit about yourself: Where did you grow up. What is your favorite memory from your Pre-K years? Any hobbies?

I grew up in Michigan. I was the oldest of four children and "directed" everyone and everything... At least I tried! One of my favorite memories involved a large mound of snow that was placed in our yard after the parking lot next store was cleared. We made it into a 3-story house complete with slides, kitchen cabinets, beds, tunnels, and hiding places. I was the foreperson (or at least I thought I was) and when it was iced over, it made a wonderful playhouse! Another memory involved the funeral of my sister's turtle. Since I had the most "preacher" experience (my father was a minister), I was selected to deliver the eulogy and the closing song. We buried Tommy by the garbage can (since it had the softest dirt and he loved food) and my 55 year old sister still remembers Tommy and the "meaningful" service!

How did you become interested in teaching?

My mother was a teacher so I practiced teaching even before I was in school. My dolls, neighborhood friends, and pets all were taught by me! I tutored all through high school and became a math tutor beginning in my freshman year. After working in a bank for one week as a computer programmer, I had no doubts I would be a teacher, working with people rather than machines! I have never been bored... Teaching is always exciting!

What is your biggest concern regarding early childhood education? If there were one thing you could change, what would it be?

My biggest concern is early childhood teachers' low expectations of young children's cognitive skills. I am continually amazed by children's thinking, inquiries, and excitement with new learning. I truly believe that if teachers spent more time listening and observing children, they would be amazed as well. I typically work in classrooms that would be classified as "high need" or "low SES" or "difficult." They are the most exciting children! They may not have had some experiences and background, but they

are so smart and willing to learn. If I could open the minds of early childhood educators to see children and their wonder and fascination, I would!

How would you describe the *I See I Learn* series to teachers and parents?

This series deals with issues that are important to young children and their development. Stuart has a unique ability to see situations and problems "as a child" and think of solutions that make sense from their viewpoints. The characters are delightful as animals, yet "child-like" so that young children will have no difficulty empathizing and understanding them. Stuart has captured a positive child-approach to difficult and important questions for young children.

If you were an *I See I Learn* character, which one would you be and why?

An easy answer. I am Freda! I am a planner and a director. Freda in "*Freda Plans a Picnic*" is me!



Freda invited Percy, Ajay, and Emma.

"Can I bring Pickle?" asked Emma.
"Sure," said Freda. "Pets can come to picnics."

JESSICA HOFFMANN DAVIS, Ed.D.

Cognitive Developmental Psychologist and Author of [“Ordinary Gifted Children: The Power and Promise of Individual Attention”](#)

Tell us a little bit about yourself: Where did you grow up. What is your favorite memory from your Pre-K years? Any hobbies?

I grew up in New York City and lived in the school house of my elementary school. My mother was the principal and I attended her school from nursery through sixth grade. My favorite Pre-K memory (if I can reliably think back that far) was learning to snap my fingers (thumb against tall man) and I remember a dilapidated wooden wagon that I loved to drag along and fill with whatever I could find. And there was a rabbit in the school... My hobbies were drawing, painting, and block building.

How did you become interested in the arts in education?

It was at the school described above, which was a place where every day, along with all the other subjects, we painted, danced, did theater, and made music. We didn't know until we left the Hoffmann School that the arts were less valued than other subjects. Indeed, there was an aura of reverence around the arts. When I was 14, I was first allowed to apprentice with the art teacher in the Art Barn at the summer day camp my family also ran. I thought (and still do) that I was working in the most important and exciting educational arena imaginable.

What is your biggest concern regarding early childhood education? If there were one thing you could change, what would it be?

The dwindling emphasis on the arts. Pre-schoolers come to school ready and able to paint and play and dance and draw and as they learn to read and write and do math, but they too quickly find out that their artistic predilections have little or no value in the “more serious” agenda of school. If I could make a change, it would be that students studied the arts every day in their curriculum, from kindergarten through high school... Of course, along with all the rest.

How would you describe the I See I Learn series to teachers and parents?

A simple and charming set of stories that offers examples of real life situations with which pre-schoolers will identify, as well as suggestions for positive action and development. Engaging and educational.

If you were an I See I Learn character, which one would you be and why?

Ajay, because I can't throw the ball.



LOUISE BELMONT-SKINNER

Vice President, Exhibits and Design at The Chicago Children's Museum (retired)

Tell us a little bit about yourself: Where did you grow up. What is your favorite memory from your Pre-K years? Any hobbies?

I was a very happy only child growing up on 116th Street in Queens, NY. There were kids in every house on the block and we played everywhere—in the street, on our front porches, in our tiny back yards. I have great memories of endless days, and the magic of dusk when the streetlights went on. I guess I'm thinking of summertime.

My pre-K memories are based on deckle-edged black and white photographs, which my parents passed on to me for safekeeping. The photos are my memories. I'm attracted to a variety of images of me between the ages of 3 through 5, with a variety of pails and shovels and I'm digging—in the my sandbox, in the garden, and at Jones Beach on Long Island. I'm an avid gardener now, and my childhood tenacity for getting my hands in the earth is documented.

How did you become interested in children's museum exhibit design?

I can trace my interest in museums to my childhood when my parents took me to the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan. The natural history dioramas were magical.

But who knew one could make museum exhibits as a profession? I discovered I could when, as an art student at Chicago Art Institute, I selected an internship in the Field Museum of Natural History's design and production department. I wanted a rest from the headiness of conceptual art, which all the students were studying. From the first day at the Field, I was immersed in the magical world of cultural artifacts and natural history collections. I learned that museum exhibit designers worked with authentic objects and transformed collections and information into visitor experiences. I was hooked on exhibit design as a profession. It has been a personal and professional evolution to understand how to design an "exhibit" or rather an experience for children. It's all about understanding the fundamental experiences of childhood and remembering how much I loved digging in the dirt (see answer to previous question).

What is your biggest concern regarding early childhood education?

My biggest concern within education systems is the lack of teaching strategies that support and reflect the connection of play and learning, which nurture kids' curiosity and develop the ability to compose the questions they are asked to answer in school.

However, if I could change one thing it would be to give all young children access to early childhood educational opportunities regardless of their economic or social condition.

How would you describe the [I See I Learn](#) series to teachers and parents?

Stuart has created a neighborhood of gentle, caring beings, which respect and nurture each other. The stories are infused with experiences in which the “kids” learn by doing and experience positive results.

Each book is a tool for a parent or teacher to present basic social concepts to children and engage them in conversations about their own experiences. With a few very carefully crafted sentences and expressive illustrations, basic life lessons are introduced. The adult characters model behavior and engage their children in important conversations about appropriate social, and emotional behavior.

If you were an [I See I Learn](#) character, which one would you be and why?

I believe Emma. She strikes me as wise.



MAURICE SYKES

Executive Director of the Early Childhood Leadership Institute
at the University of the District of Columbia

Tell us a little bit about yourself: Where did you grow up. What is your favorite memory from your Pre-K years? Any hobbies?

I grew up in upstate NY. Schenectady to be exact. My favorite memories of Pre-K, which was actually called nursery school at that time, was playing with blocks and singing songs that required a little animation.

How did you become interested in early childhood education?

I never wanted to be a teacher. I was a sociology major and I wanted to be a social worker or an industrial psychologist. Originally, I wanted to become an industrial psychologist. I was slated to go to graduate school but entered the teaching profession as an alternative to military service. My first year I team-taught an ungraded, ages 5-8, all boys, primary class. The rest, as they say, is history. I fell in love with those boys and they fell in love with me. And I also fell in love with the art and science of teaching.

What is your biggest concern regarding early childhood education? If there were one thing you could change, what would it be?

I would change the way we prepare teachers. I think that a clinical, residency model where you study under a master teacher is the way to go. My approach to teaching and interacting with young children still resembles the way my master teacher, Mary Gardner, worked with young children.

How would you describe the [I See I Learn](#) series to teachers and parents?

I would say that it is a fun and easy way to develop early literacy and mathematical thinking in young children. The series is visually attractive and engaging and it provides children with something to think about and something to do.

If you were an **I See I Learn** character, which one would you be and why?

Ajay. I like his name and I like the idea that he is focused on his physical self. Something I have never had the courage to do.

