

Reading with children can improve their language, literacy, and social-emotional skills, increasing their knowledge of the world around them. With the right book choices, reading can introduce children to healthy eating habits too!



ZORA'S ZUCCHINI

by Katherine Pryor

What It's All About

One summer, Zora begins to grow zucchini in her garden. As her plants grow, she suddenly has more zucchini than her family can eat! Clever Zora organizes a neighborhood garden swap to trade her zucchini for other yummy fruits and vegetables.

Discover a World of Words

Throughout the story, introduce new vocabulary words using gestures, tone of voice, pointing to illustrations, or providing brief explanations. Examples include:

- *droopy*: to sink, bend, or hang down
- *vine*: a plant that has very long stems and grows along the ground or up and around something
- *marinate*: to put in a sauce for a period of time to add flavor
- *swap*: to trade

Make Connections Beyond the Book

After reading the story, make connections to an aspect of the child's real life by:

- Growing your own zucchini! Head to the hardware store, just like Zora did, and purchase seed packets or zucchini plants. Be sure to follow the planting directions and watch the zucchini grow!
- Trying zucchini different ways. Zora and her family made bread and soup with her zucchini. They also marinated and grated and barbecued the zucchini too! The possibilities are endless.
- Creating garden swap signs. Zora and her family painted and printed signs for her garden swap. Using crayons, markers, and paint, create signs for Zora's garden swap. Be sure to include pictures of different fruits and vegetables from newspapers or magazines too.

Dig into the Story

Develop children's comprehension of the story by discussing higher-level information (e.g., link characters' feelings to their actions and/or events in the story, predict what might happen, summarize chunks of text). Use prompts throughout the story, such as:

- *In this picture, Zora finds her very first zucchini. How do you think she feels? I see that she is smiling from ear to ear. Why do you think she is excited to show her family her first zucchini?*
- *There are a lot of zucchini in this picture! Zora does not look excited about how many zucchini her plants have grown. What do you think she should do with all of her zucchini?*
- *Zora's garden swap is a success! What fruits and vegetables do her neighbors and friends bring to swap?*

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Definitions taken from *Learners Dictionary*. (2016). (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated) Retrieved from *LearnersDictionary.com*.



Jumpstart

Jumpstart is a national early education organization working toward the day every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed.

Learn more at jstart.org.

Together Time Activity

GET YOURSELF OUT OF A PICKLE

Whether you grew a lot in your garden or bought extra during a sale at the store, extra vegetables can present a predicament—you don't want to waste any, but you just can't eat them fast enough. Pickling provides a solution!

Making refrigerator pickles is easy for kids of all ages and provides a hands-on science lesson about mixtures and solutions. Simply cut up extra vegetables and put them in jars with an easy brine, then refrigerate, and enjoy them over the next few months. Pickled vegetables also make great gifts.

What You'll Need: a few pounds of fresh vegetables, vinegar for brine (white, cider, or other), seasonings (dill, garlic, etc.), several pint-size or larger glass jars with tight-fitting lids (reused pickle or spaghetti jars work great)

1 Mix the brine. Combine 1 cup of vinegar and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup kosher salt in a large bowl, stir until completely dissolved, then add 4 cups water and give it another good stir to mix.

2 Cut and pack your vegetables. For this type of pickling, there's no need to have a precise amount of vegetables, just use what is readily available. Cut cucumbers into spears; carrots (peeled) into $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick sticks; beets (peeled) into $\frac{1}{2}$ -1" chunks; bell peppers into $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide strips; red radishes into halves; onions into wedges; broccoli or cauliflower into florets; okra or green beans can stay whole. Feel free to mix different vegetables in a jar, just keep in mind some may take longer to fully absorb flavors than others, and some (like onions) may alter the flavor of the brine. Pack the vegetables into the jar tightly, and make sure all of the vegetable tops are below the rim to leave room for the brine.

3 Add your flavors. Want a traditional pickle flavor? Add several sprigs of fresh dill, 1 teaspoon of whole coriander seeds, and 2-3 whole garlic cloves to each pint-size jar. For something a little different, use sprigs of tarragon instead of dill. Like it hot? Add a fresh jalapeño, sliced lengthwise, to each jar. Experiment with different herb and spice combinations.

4 Pour the brine into each jar. Fill each jar so that the vegetables are completely covered in the brine, then screw the lids on tightly. Leftover brine can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 months and can be used for your next batch of pickles.

5 Refrigerate and wait. After about two weeks, taste your pickled vegetables to see if they are to your liking yet. If not, wait another week or two and taste them again. The longer you wait, the more intense the flavor will become.

Tip: For food safety, always keep your pickling jars refrigerated and use a clean fork to fish out vegetables from inside the jar.

Talking Points:

Have a family discussion about the many ways people preserve foods (canning, curing, smoking, drying, dehydrating, etc.) and how that influences our eating habits:

- With modern transportation and refrigeration, we have access to many fresh foods year-round that are grown around the world, but that wasn't always the case. Before refrigeration and industrialization of our food supply, pickling and canning were regular household activities since it was the best way of preserving fresh produce for the winter.
- Today preservatives are often added to foods so they can be shipped long distances or last longer in a package on the store shelf. Some preservatives are natural (like the salt and vinegar used in your pickles) and some are artificial.
- Read the labels on your favorite packaged foods and look for ingredients that might be preservatives, then search online to find out if they are natural or artificial.