

Catch!

The 2026 CLEL Bell Award Book for PLAY

by Trish Cooke, illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max

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Playing catch with Mom is the best way to explore the world—and finish the day! A joyful, sensory picture book that captures the tender moments between parent and child. Perfect for curious preschoolers and kindergarteners who love to play!

This story has excellent modeling of a parent directing supportive play with a child throughout the day. Both characters are willing to adjust and keep trying new things until they find the form of play that is “just right”. Repetitive phrases support vocabulary building, phonetic awareness, and predictive skills.

Activity Ideas for *Catch!*:

- Of course your child is going to want to play catch with you after reading this book! Find items around you that would be safe to gently toss back and forth. A pair of balled-up socks works great! Be sure to repeat, “Catch!” just like Mom and Kiona do. Continue acting out the story, saying, “No problem, we’ll find something else,” if the item tossed isn’t right. Describe each item by color, size, weight or shape to introduce new concepts and vocabulary.
- When shopping in the grocery store or market with your young one, think out loud. Hold familiar items and name them, then use a word to describe each one. For example, pick up an apple and say, “We need smooth, red apples. Hmm, this apple is bumpy and yellow. Oh, this apple is smooth and red!” This models thinking and problem-solving skills in real-life situations.
- Kiona experiences a range of emotions throughout the book, including excitement, frustration, sadness and thoughtfulness. Sing “If You’re Happy and You Know It” using different emotions for each verse. Make up your own motions to go with each emotion, like “If you’re sad and you know it, turn around,” or “If you’re angry and you know it, cross your arms.”

The CLEL Bell Picture Book Awards are given to books that provide excellent support of early literacy development in young children. For more information and for other activity sheets, visit <http://www.clel.org> and select the CLEL Bell Awards tab.



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