Offshoots

rooted in knowledge • reaching for wonder

Family Unit Studies

by Susie Allison, M. Ed
co-authored by Erica Spear

Welcome to Offshoots

I know it's already in the header, but welcome! Welcome to Offshoots and to a reimagining of how learning can look, feel, and flow within a family. It is an honor that you've chosen this program, and I'm delighted to be part of your educational journey, even if only through the pages of these units.

I'm Susie Allison—the author of Offshoots. I have a Master's in Early Childhood Education, worked as an elementary school teacher, and launched the Instagram parenting account "Busy Toddler" in 2015, which now has more than 2 million followers. In 2017, I wrote the Playing Preschool curriculum, which quickly became one of the most popular home preschool programs. My path into home learning feels inevitable, and I've loved being on it.

Throughout my family's homeschool experience, I've worked tirelessly to create an environment where multi-age learning, knowledge acquisition, and family time weave together seamlessly. My philosophy has always been that children learn best in context, building broad knowledge bases through thematic units that connect subject areas. For twenty years, I've seen firsthand how children thrive in an open-ended, integrated learning model. When subjects are taught in isolation, a far more typical learning model, understanding can be limited. Instead, my focus has always been on interconnected learning, where subjects branch off from one another. It is here that children gain better retention, deeper comprehension, and a genuine appreciation for how learning fits continuously into their world. This is where our Offshoots journey begins.

I've sat where you are many times with a new program on my lap and that unmistakable feeling of heading into the unknown. As a teacher, I was often handed a curriculum and expected to implement it immediately. As a homeschooling parent, I've purchased programs only to spend weeks figuring out how to teach them, wondering what the author intended, and trying to understand the end goals before even starting lesson one. That feeling is overwhelming. I don't want that for you.

Think of this Start-Up Guide as a fireside chat—a chance to walk you through Offshoots, highlight the key features, and share practical teaching tips to help you make the most of these units from Day One. These pages are designed to help you hit the ground running with confidence. I can't wait for you to dive in.

Before we begin this journey, I'd like to introduce my co-author, Erica Spear. Throughout her life, learning and the pursuit of knowledge have been at the core of Erica's life. Erica spent her childhood moving between different cities in Europe and the U.S., attending schools in the Netherlands, Paris, and Chicago. She holds a double degree from Northwestern University in French and Communications.

We also happen to live next door to each other and walked into homeschooling together, creating a two-family community of learners. Our five children, ranging in age, interests, and ability levels, remind us daily how powerful family-centered, mixed-age learning can be, whether it's with a sibling, a friend, or a parent learning with the child. I knew I couldn't write this program without my longtime teaching partner, and that her voice, passion for the arts and literature, and gentle teaching style would help build Offshoots into the well-rounded, balanced, and thoughtful program you see today. The "we" you'll hear from in this Start-Up guide is us as a teaching team.

It's almost time to begin Offshoots. I hope you enjoy this program and that it fills your family with special memories of learning and growing together. It is a joy to be on this journey with you.

Program Overview

A Quick Look at the Units

Let's start with the big picture of Offshoots before we get down to the nitty-gritty details. Here's an overview of the program, a look at how the units are structured and organized, and how they can be used with your family.

Learning through Connection

Offshoots employs a unique design of foundational knowledge, interconnected subject areas, and hands-on, discovery-based learning. The units in Offshoots were specifically chosen for their rich vocabulary, ability to translate across domains, and depth of topic.

Remember that a unit may appear from the name as inherently tilted to one subject area, but, in fact, they are masterfully designed to cross domains within the topic. Each unit—whether rooted in science, social studies, or literature—bridges into poetry, fine arts, language arts, sensory exploration, gross motor play, dramatic play, and STEM.

Order of Learning

There is no predetermined sequence for these units. Choose the units based on what works best for your family, time of year, and season of learning. Within each unit, the weekly subtopics are placed in a specific order that must be maintained for proper knowledge and skill development.

Methodology & Philosophy

Offshoots is built on a strong three-pillar educational philosophy shaped by Susie's 20 years of working with kids, Erica's decade of parenting, and our combined passion for lifelong learning. These pillars form the backbone of our family life and how we educate our kids at home, and now, form the core of these units.

Pillar 1: Family Learning

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is the understanding that learning never stops. Education isn't about reaching an endpoint. It's a lifelong process of curiosity, discovery, and growth. We can choose to never stop learning.

Offshoots is designed for the whole family. When adults learn alongside children, we show them that knowledge isn't something you acquire and store away; instead, it's something you build, explore, and connect over. It makes learning part of human life, not something that's only for childhood or that adults impart to children. This program isn't about teaching *at* children; it's about learning *with* them.

Follow the paths together. Branch out. Chase the offshoots. Let curiosity lead you, side by side, as you model what it means to be a lifelong learner.

Pillar 2: Interconnected Subjects

Learning is at its highest when it isn't confined to single categories. Too often, education is broken into isolated subjects (math, reading, science, social studies, art), each standing alone, hoping to capture a child's attention. But the world doesn't exist in singular subjects, and neither should learning.

When learning domains overlap and weave together, something powerful happens: children see the bigger picture. They discover that science isn't just in experiments. It's in poetry, fine art, and the way we describe the world through language and literature. A child who loves science is drawn deeper with new avenues to explore. A child who isn't naturally science-focused finds meaningful entry points through storytelling, music, and hands-on experiences.

Offshoots is built on a foundation of connection. Every unit is designed to extend across multiple domains, making learning immersive, engaging, and full of discovery. From the books we read to the music we hear to the activities we try together, learning comes to life through connection.

Pillar 3: Foundational Knowledge

Knowledge matters. The more a child knows, the easier it is for them to continue learning. It's that simple.

When kids have a strong foundation—when they've been exposed to a wide range of topics, ideas, and vocabulary—they have something to pull from when new ideas are presented. They make connections faster, understand concepts quicker, and read with greater comprehension because they know things. Background knowledge is a powerful advantage, as it fuels learning, builds confidence, and helps kids grasp complex ideas more easily.

Unfortunately, education often focuses on isolated skills instead of real, meaningful knowledge. Kids are taught how to *find* information without ever really *learning* it. That's why the units in Offshoots go deep. Instead of surface-level exposure, we immerse kids in rich content, weaving actual knowledge into every lesson and unit. When kids develop a strong knowledge base spanning science, social studies, literature, and beyond, they aren't just prepared for their next assignment. They're ready for a lifetime of learning.

Where to Start

In the following pages, we outline exactly how to get things going to help reduce your mental load as you begin your journey. From gathering the supplies to understanding the components, to actually teaching a lesson, let's unpack Offshoots.

Glance at a Unit

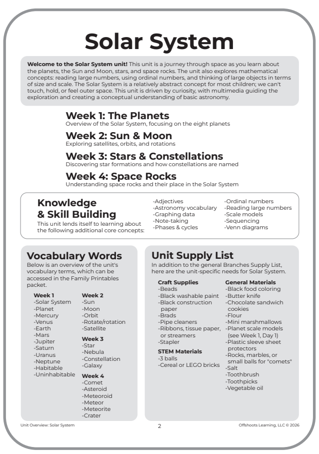
Give yourself a few minutes to check out how a unit looks as a whole. Notice the patterns in each week, the cadence of each day, and the format of lessons. The units are all structured in this soon-to-be-familiar pattern, so whether your family is starting with Dinosaurs or Underground Worlds, the program's flow remains consistent.

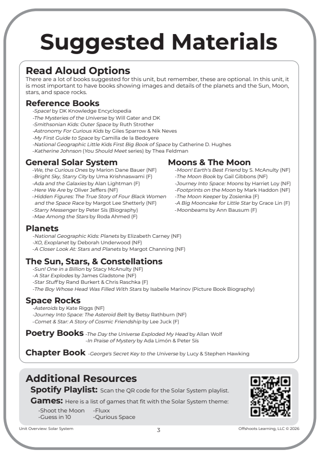
Take a Unit Scavenger Hunt

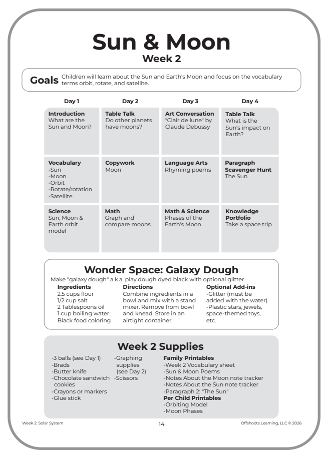
To help familiarize yourself with the program, take a little scavenger hunt and find these features in a single unit. The program is easier to understand and teach once you're familiar with the various parts.

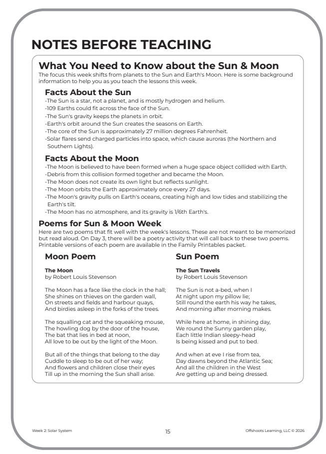
See if you can locate:

-Each week's subtopic
-Unit vocabulary list
-Suggested book list
-Additional resources
-Goal for the week
-Weekly lesson overview "grid"
-Weekly supply list
-Notes Before Teaching









Pacing the Program

Offshoots was written as individual units with a four-day learning week model. However (and this is a big however), the pacing is whatever you make of it. Don't get hung up on days and weeks. You can think of the lessons as Lesson 1 and Lesson 2, and create a pacing path that works for your family.

There is no expectation that you'll finish each unit exactly four weeks after beginning it. Learning at home is meant to be flexible, fluid, and fit into your lifestyle. Offshoots will do the same. If you miss a week, come back to it when you're ready. The lessons and the learning are there when you need them, right where you left off.

How to Read a Unit

It's time to get into the specifics of how a unit is laid out, what a week looks like in Offshoots, and how to decode a lesson plan. We aren't going to leave you to figure this out on your own. The following few pages peel back the layers of this program, give you insights into our what and why, and set you up for success right from the first lesson. There's nothing we want more than to support your teaching and your family's learning.

The Unit Overview

The first two pages of each unit provide an overview of the theme, subtopics, supply lists, and other suggested materials. The goal of these pages is to lay a foundation for the next four weeks of learning.

Introduction to the unit theme and goals

A look at all the **knowledge and skills** your child(ren) will be exposed to.

A breakdown of the **4 subtopics** so you can see the scope and breadth of the unit.

Overview of the vocabulary for the unit. Vocabulary sheets are in the Family Printable Packet.

In addition to the main Offshoots Supply List (see page 18), each unit has **specific supplies** needed.

Solar System

Welcome to the Solar System unit! This unit is a journey through space as you learn about the planets, the Sun and Moon, stars, and space rocks. The unit also explores mathematical concepts: reading large numbers, using ordinal numbers, and thinking of large objects in terms of size and scale. The Solar System is a relatively abstract concept for most children; we can't touch, hold, or feel outer space. This unit is driven by curiosity, with multimedia guiding the exploration and creating a conceptual understanding of basic astronomy.

Week 1: The Planets
Overview of the Solar System, focusing on the eight planets

Week 2: Sun & Moon
Exploring satellites, orbits, and rotations

Week 3: Stars & Constellations
Discovering star formations and how constellations are named

Week 4: Space Rocks
Understanding space rocks and their place in the Solar System

Knowledge & Skill Building
This unit lends itself to learning about the following additional core concepts:

-Adjectives
-Astronomy vocabulary
-Graphing data
-Note-taking
-Phases & cycles
-Ordinal numbers
-Reading large numbers
-Scale models
-Sequencing
-Venn diagrams

Vocabulary Words
Below is an overview of the unit's vocabulary terms, which can be accessed in the Family Printables packet.

Week 1
-Solar System
-Planet
-Mercury
-Venus
-Earth
-Mars
-Jupiter
-Saturn
-Uranus
-Neptune
-Habitable
-Uninhabitable

Week 2
-Sun
-Moon
-Orbit
-Rotate/rotation
-Satellite

Week 3
-Star
-Nebula
-Constellation
-Galaxy

Week 4
-Comet
-Asteroid
-Meteoroid
-Meteor
-Meteorite
-Crater

Unit Supply List
In addition to the general Branches Supply List, here are the unit-specific needs for Solar System.

Craft Supplies
-Beads
-Black washable paint
-Black construction paper
-Brads
-Pipe cleaners
-Ribbons, tissue paper, or streamers
-Stapler

STEM Materials
-3 balls
-Cereal or LEGO bricks

General Materials
-Black food coloring
-Butter knife
-Chocolate sandwich cookies
-Flour
-Mini marshmallows
-Planet scale models (see Week 1, Day 1)
-Plastic sleeve sheet protectors
-Rocks, marbles, or small balls for "comets"
-Salt
-Toothbrush
-Toothpicks
-Vegetable oil

Unit Overview: Solar System 2 Offshoots Learning, LLC © 2026

The Suggested Materials

Let's start with the keyword on this page: **suggested**. Nothing is required, but this page has suggestions of books, music, and games to support your family's immersion in the topic. Notice the following features on each Suggested Materials page (more on the Book List on page 19):

Read Aloud Options: A comprehensive list to help you begin finding books to read to your family over the course of the unit. Note the mix of fiction and nonfiction options.
Categories: The book list is sorted into categories to help you find a variety of titles.
Poetry Book: Each unit has a poetry book option that makes for a wonderful way to cross learning domains and soften meaty topics.
Chapter Book: An optional read-aloud that provides another chance to immerse your family in this topic and build memories together.
Board Games: There is no expectation to buy these, but if you have them or access to a game library, these fit the theme.
Playlist: A QR code to scan for access to the unit playlist (see below for more information).

Suggested Materials

Read Aloud Options

There are a lot of books suggested for this unit, but remember, these are optional. In this unit, it is most important to have books showing images and details of the planets and the Sun, Moon, stars, and space rocks.

Reference Books

- *Space!* by DK Knowledge Encyclopedia
- *The Mysteries of the Universe* by Will Gater and DK
- *Smithsonian Kids: Outer Space* by Ruth Strother
- *Astronomy For Curious Kids* by Giles Sparrow & Nik Neves
- *My First Guide to Space* by Camilla de la Bedoyere
- *National Geographic Little Kids First Big Book of Space* by Catherine D. Hughes
- *Katherine Johnson* (*You Should Meet* series) by Thea Feldman

General Solar System

- *We, the Curious Ones* by Marion Dane Bauer (NF)
- *Bright Sky, Starry City* by Uma Krishnaswami (F)
- *Ada and the Galaxies* by Alan Lightman (F)
- *Here We Are* by Oliver Jeffers (NF)
- *Hidden Figures: The True Story of Four Black Women and the Space Race* by Margot Lee Shetterly (NF)
- *Starry Messenger* by Peter Sís (Biography)
- *Mae Among the Stars* by Roda Ahmed (F)

Moons & The Moon

- *Moon! Earth's Best Friend* by S. McAnulty (NF)
- *The Moon Book* by Gail Gibbons (NF)
- *Journey Into Space: Moons* by Harriet Loy (NF)
- *Footprints on the Moon* by Mark Haddon (NF)
- *The Moon Keeper* by Zosienka (F)
- *A Big Mooncake for Little Star* by Grace Lin (F)
- *Moonbeams* by Ann Bausum (F)

Planets

- *National Geographic Kids: Planets* by Elizabeth Carney (NF)
- *XO, Exoplanet* by Deborah Underwood (NF)
- *A Closer Look At: Stars and Planets* by Margot Channing (NF)

The Sun, Stars, & Constellations

- *Sun! One in a Billion* by Stacy McAnulty (NF)
- *A Star Explodes* by James Gladstone (NF)
- *Star Stuff* by Rand Burkert & Chris Raschka (F)
- *The Boy Whose Head Was Filled With Stars* by Isabelle Marinov (Picture Book Biography)

Space Rocks

- *Asteroids* by Kate Riggs (NF)
- *Journey Into Space: The Asteroid Belt* by Betsy Rathburn (NF)
- *Comet & Star: A Story of Cosmic Friendship* by Lee Juck (F)

Poetry Books

- *The Day the Universe Exploded My Head* by Allan Wolf
- *In Praise of Mystery* by Ada Limón & Peter Sís

Chapter Book

- *George's Secret Key to the Universe* by Lucy & Stephen Hawking

Additional Resources

Spotify Playlist: Scan the QR code for the Solar System playlist.

Games: Here is a list of games that fit with the Solar System theme:

-Shoot the Moon
-Guess in 10
-Fluxx
-Qurious Space

Unit Overview: Solar System 3 Offshoots Learning, LLC © 2026

Why Include a Playlist?

Classical music and fine arts are often the focus of home learning programs. There's so much value in these, but contemporary music has value in building knowledge, too. Each unit has an optional playlist curated with songs from the last 80 years to support the immersive, interconnected mission of Offshoots. Yes, listening to "Spring" by Vivaldi is perfect for a Weather Unit, but so is "Have You Ever Seen the Rain?" by Creedence Clearwater Revival and "Here Comes the Sun" by The Beatles.

These playlists are a playful way to continue weaving thematic learning into everyday life, but are not required. If they fit with your family, we hope you enjoy them. Maybe you'll toss one on while you're doing the dishes, playing, or in the car. There's no right or wrong way to use them.

The Weekly Overview

Each week in Offshoots begins with a similar-looking page. This consistent structure helps set you up for success. No guessing what a week will look like, no wondering what the flow will be. The Offshoots formula creates a predictable routine for success—success for you and your family.

The Weekly Grid

The Weekly Grid is an overview of your week so you can see, at a quick glance, what learning will take place.

We love having a clear picture of what to teach and how the week will progress, rather than guessing the order or expectations or creating our own schedule to follow. This grid lays the week out in front of you. No surprises. No reinventing the wheel. No wondering what to do and when. You can rely on us to help with order, pacing, and flow. All that being said, the structure is built on a flexible routine. Make it your own. Make it work for your family.

Each row in the grid corresponds to a specific type of activity. This formula stays consistent in every unit.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Row 1	**Introduction** What are the Sun and Moon?	**Table Talk** Do other planets have moons?	**Art Conversation** "Clair de lune" by Claude Debussy	**Table Talk** What is the Sun's impact on Earth?
Row 2	**Vocabulary** -Sun -Moon -Orbit -Rotate/rotation -Satellite	**Copywork** Moon	**Language Arts** Rhyming poems	**Paragraph Scavenger Hunt** The Sun
Row 3	**Science** Sun, Moon & Earth orbit model	**Math** Graph and compare moons	**Math & Science** Phases of the Earth's Moon	**Knowledge Portfolio** Take a space trip

Row 1: Conversation

This row highlights the conversations you'll have as a family, including topic introductions, table talk subjects, and fine art conversations. We'll go over each of these in more detail on page 11.

Row 2: Language Arts

Language arts provide a great avenue for crossing domains, so we lean into that with an LA-focused lesson each day, from vocabulary activities to copywork to deconstructing paragraphs. Features from this row will be explored in detail on page 12.

Row 3: Hands-on Activity

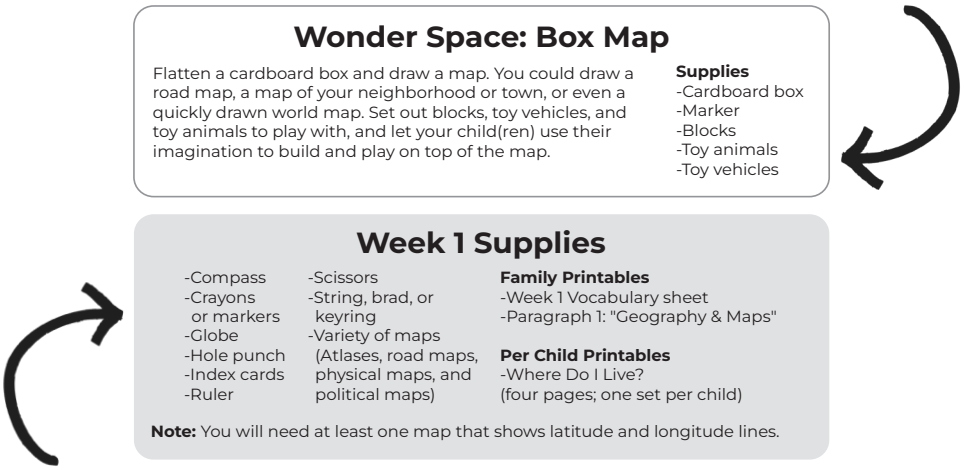
Learning is brought to life with a hands-on daily activity to deepen knowledge. These activities are written with step-by-step directions and minimal supply lists. More information on these activities is on page 13.

The Wonder Space Activity

We created a Wonder Space activity as a fun weekly option to support a variety of learners. The Wonder Space activity is meant to stay out all week, allowing children to explore and play with a topic-themed activity independently throughout the day, not just during "learning time."

These activities are designed to hold the attention of a wide range of children, from preschool-age to the biggest of big kids. In your house, this might be the activity that keeps hands busy during a chapter-book read-aloud. It may be what a four-year-old sibling plays with while you attend to an older child. It could be the activity your child engages with while you meal prep or after they finish their other schoolwork.

There's no right or wrong way to use a Wonder Space activity, and they are totally optional. These kinds of activities are a helpful tool that can support so many children in so many different ways.



Wonder Space: Box Map

Flatten a cardboard box and draw a map. You could draw a road map, a map of your neighborhood or town, or even a quickly drawn world map. Set out blocks, toy vehicles, and toy animals to play with, and let your child(ren) use their imagination to build and play on top of the map.

Supplies
-Cardboard box
-Marker
-Blocks
-Toy animals
-Toy vehicles

Week 1 Supplies

-Compass
-Crayons or markers
-Globe
-Hole punch
-Index cards
-Ruler
-Scissors
-String, brad, or keyring
-Variety of maps (Atlases, road maps, physical maps, and political maps)

Family Printables
-Week 1 Vocabulary sheet
-Paragraph 1: "Geography & Maps"

Per Child Printables
-Where Do I Live? (four pages; one set per child)

Note: You will need at least one map that shows latitude and longitude lines.

Weekly Supply List

The unit supply list is divided into week-specific lists on the weekly overview page and activity-by-activity on the daily lesson plan pages. Some supplies are collections of items or offer multiple options, like craft supplies or toys for building. For these supplies, there is a note to see the day of that specific lesson for more information on the materials needed.

Note the Family and Per Child Printables you'll need for lessons throughout the week. These are accessed on your Offshoots Dashboard, where all of your unit materials are stored.

Notes Before Teaching

At the start of each week, there's a page of notes for you, the teacher. It's a chance for us to give you some background information for teaching, offer a heads-up on any look-fors this week, and provide another layer of support.

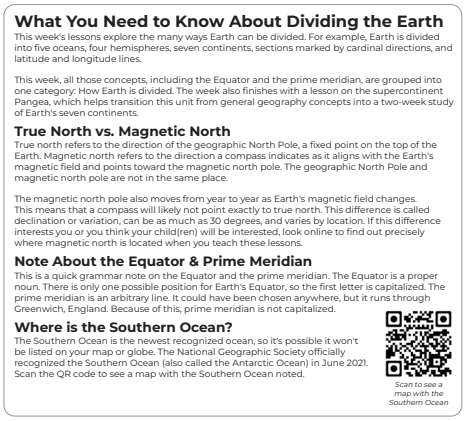
What You Need to Know

Don't gloss over or skip this section. You are also a learner in this program, and this section specifically talks to you as the learning adult. Background information is important to being a confident teacher. We want you to feel that, so we wrote this section to support you.

Other Notes

There are often other notes in the Notes Before Teaching section, such as lesson prep to complete before Day 1 or an introductory video to watch with your family. The takeaway? Don't skip this page. It's important to read it.

NOTES BEFORE TEACHING



What You Need to Know About Dividing the Earth

This week's lessons explore the many ways Earth can be divided. For example, Earth is divided into five oceans, four hemispheres, seven continents, sections marked by cardinal directions, and latitude and longitude lines.

This week, all those concepts, including the Equator and the prime meridian, are grouped into one category: How Earth is divided. The week also finishes with a lesson on the supercontinent Pangea, which helps transition this unit from general geography concepts into a two-week study of Earth's seven continents.

True North vs. Magnetic North

True north refers to the direction of the geographic North Pole, a fixed point on the top of the Earth. Magnetic north refers to the direction a compass indicates as it aligns with the Earth's magnetic field and points toward the magnetic north pole. The geographic North Pole and magnetic north pole are not in the same place.

The magnetic north pole also moves from year to year as Earth's magnetic field changes. This means that a compass will likely not point exactly to true north. This difference is called declination or variation, can be as much as 30 degrees, and varies by location. If this difference interests you or you think your child(ren) will be interested, look online to find out precisely where magnetic north is located when you teach these lessons.

Note About the Equator & Prime Meridian

This is a quick grammar note on the Equator and the prime meridian. The Equator is a proper noun. There is only one possible position for Earth's Equator, so the first letter is capitalized. The prime meridian is an arbitrary line. It could have been chosen anywhere, but it runs through Greenwich, England. Because of this, prime meridian is not capitalized.

Where is the Southern Ocean?

The Southern Ocean is the newest recognized ocean, so it's possible it won't be listed on your map or globe. The National Geographic Society officially recognized the Southern Ocean (also called the Antarctic Ocean) in June 2021. Scan the QR code to see a map with the Southern Ocean noted.

Scan to see a map with the Southern Ocean

Daily Lesson Plan

Let's get you ready to teach an actual lesson in Offshoots. One thing we hope you notice right away is how detailed these plans are. We are with you in this. We are walking beside you. We want you to feel confident and supported as you embark on this journey with your family.

Features to Help You Teach

Lightly scripted prompts in a **bolder font** to help you lead the learning.
Guiding questions to anchor the lesson.
Information for you on the goals of the lesson (why we chose an activity and what the intended learning outcome is).
Step-by-step guidance so you know how a lesson flows and the full scope of a project. There's no need to guess what to do or how to do an activity.
Circle back prompts wrap up each lesson or activity as a powerful way to check in with your child(ren) for understanding.

Spotlight on Lesson Styles

On the Weekly Grid, we went over the different features of each row. Let's explore those in more detail so you get a better, more complete picture of what kinds of conversations, language arts lessons, and hands-on activities are featured in Offshoots.

Row 1: Conversations

Here's a zoom-in on the three conversation styles you'll find throughout each unit.

Introduction

Day 1 of each week begins with an introduction. This is a way for you to lay the foundation for the week's learning and give your children an overview of what's to come. This is your hook and a chance to "sell" them on the topic. On Days 2 and 3, you'll start with a quick review to set the stage for the day's learning. On Day 4, you'll work on your Dictionary Portfolio (more on page 16).

Table Talk

Rather than sitting and lecturing children, talking at them, and pushing information, we believe the best learning happens when we sit around and chat with children. We call these "Table Talks."

Full disclosure, this is a more "direct instruction" portion of the day where you will teach and lead a discussion, but it is set up with an emphasis on questioning, discovery, and curiosity. There is room in these discussions for the child's voice and thoughts. There is also room for you to share your own knowledge and grow together.

Art Conversation

Each week, a musical piece, painting, or sculpture is given a moment in the spotlight. We chose to weave fine arts into Offshoots, connecting them to the overall topic and as an extension of the theme rather than learning them in isolation. Connecting great works to thematic learning builds a firmer foundation. It's at the very core of Offshoots to set up learning this way: Weave the arts into other domains instead of pulling them apart to stand alone.

Row 2: Language Arts

Offshoots is not specifically a language arts curriculum, but we found language arts to be a wonderful tool for crossing subject areas in a deeply meaningful way and getting a lot of bang for the learning buck. Here are some of the language arts components you can expect to see each week:

Vocabulary

Offshoots leans into vocabulary building. Each Day 1, your family will complete a lesson on the week's vocabulary words. Throughout the week, learning will revolve around these words. On Day 4, your family will add these vocabulary words to your Dictionary Portfolio, a living document for storing and reviewing terms. The Dictionary Portfolio is further discussed in detail on page 16.

Copywork

Each week of Offshoots includes a short copywork word or sentence with leveled options. These prompts work for a wide range of ages and abilities, and you can always tweak them to fit your family. Your child(ren) will copy the word or sentence into a notebook or onto a whiteboard.

Copywork helps kids build handwriting skills, practice spelling and vocabulary, and pay attention to grammar and punctuation. If your kids resist it, try switching things up. Use gel pens on construction paper, try a whiteboard and marker, or use window crayons on a glass door. The goal is letter formation and noticing how words are spelled—the tool they use is up to you. Play the unit's playlist if music helps set the mood. Remind kids to take their time and focus on forming their letters well. Remember, one well-written "a" is more valuable than a whole page of rushed work.

Poetry

Most units include one lesson that explores a style of poetry and connects it to the theme. Poetry is a powerful learning tool—building literacy and language skills while deepening the understanding of a topic. Your family will explore different poetry styles throughout the program. Consider saving these in a family poem book or adding them to your child's Knowledge Portfolio (see page 15).

Language Arts Activity

Each week, often on Day 3, you'll find a hands-on language arts activity. These vary, but they are usually full-body learning experiences done as a family. Activities explore everything from grammar and sentence building to root words, prefixes, superlatives, onomatopoeia, and more.

Offshoots connects language arts with each unit's topic to help kids learn these skills in context rather than isolation. Sequence words feel more meaningful when tied to the water cycle or fossil formation. Using adjectives while exploring States of Matter adds a whole new layer to a science concept.

Paragraph Scavenger Hunt

On Day 4 of each week, your family will complete a Paragraph Scavenger Hunt with nonfiction text written for Offshoots. These paragraphs are important tools for many reasons, including that they provide opportunities to practice the different language arts skills learned throughout each unit and to read a nonfiction text for meaning.

You'll find them in the Family Printables Packet. Print them out, read aloud, and follow the detective work in the lesson plan. You might be searching for nouns, adjectives, similes, or topic sentences—or even counting capital letters. These paragraphs are thoughtfully written, rich in content, and offer opportunities to learn more about grammar, parts of speech, and concepts aligned with the unit.

Row 3: Hands-On Activities

The final part of each Offshoots day is a hands-on activity. These activities offer the richest opportunity for connecting subject areas—applying architecture to social studies, linking plant anatomy to language arts, or turning animal relationships into gross motor imaginary play. These meaningful links and immersive moments form the core of Offshoots.

Guiding Questions

Most activities and many of the Table Talks begin with a guiding question. Guiding questions are anchors, thesis statements, and topic sentences. These help align learning and give it purpose: You are working to answer or discover more information. Don't skip these. Guiding questions are important tools for helping kids understand what they're doing and why. It’s a powerful place to learn from.

Supply Lists

Even though we've added an Offshoots Supply List, a unit overview supply list, and a weekly supply list (covered on page 18), we still don't want to leave you stranded mid-lesson when you realize a supply is needed and it's not in front of you. Supply lists for each hands-on activity can be found in the right-hand column.

Step-by-Step Guidance

Each lesson has been carefully written with key features included to help set you up for success when teaching. Try not to skim the directions for an activity as they have a lot packed inside them, including light scripts to help you know what to say. We've included many details to help make lessons successful and learning complete.

-Look for the goal of the activity. It's a note right after the guiding question and gives you a window into why the activity was chosen and what you can expect to get out of it.
-There's often a Part 1: Discussion for you to lead, then a Part 2 where learning is hands-on.
-Directions, scripts, prompts, and additional questions are included to support you.

Optional Extensions & Lessons

Sprinkled throughout each unit are optional extensions and optional lessons. Sometimes, these extensions are meant to capture the attention of learners ready for a challenge, and sometimes, they are for any learner—time and bandwidth permitting. Optional lessons may be a fun way for your family to branch out.

Leveling and Multi-Age Learners

We are passionate about meeting kids where they are, providing opportunities for challenge, and giving chances for growth. Offshoots meets these expectations in a few ways. Sometimes, you'll see leveled ideas where you can choose the best path for your child(ren). Working with multi-age learners often comes back to their application of knowledge, not their needing completely separate lessons. Asking, "Why don't ocean animals sink?" is a valid question for a 6-year-old and a 10-year-old, and their answers will be vastly, beautifully, and wonderfully different.

Circle Back

We love a clear conclusion to a lesson, so "Circle Back" is what we call looping the lesson full circle or giving children space to share what they've learned. It's an "exit ticket" of sorts and a chance to give the lesson a final note to end on.

Reviewing the Parts of a Lesson

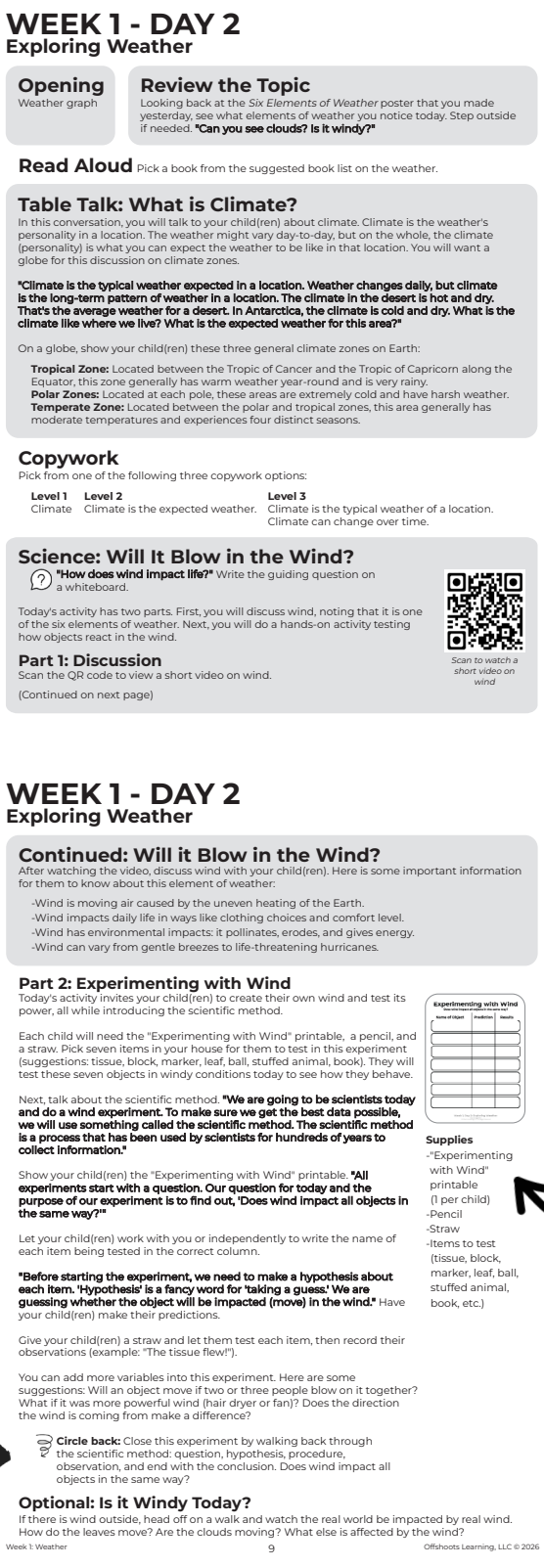
Now that we've examined the different features of a daily lesson in detail, let's identify them on a lesson plan page. Remember that each day's format will vary, but the overall formula and routine will stay the same for consistency.

1. Start the day by **introducing or reviewing learning**

3. The **conversation** for the day. In this lesson, it's a Table Talk.

5. The **Hands-On Activity** with a guiding question, Part 1: Discussion, and a Part 2: Step-by-step experiment.

7. **"Circle back"** prompt to close out the lesson



WEEK 1 - DAY 2
Exploring Weather

Opening
Weather graph

Review the Topic
Looking back at the *Six Elements of Weather* poster that you made yesterday, see what elements of weather you notice today. Step outside if needed. **"Can you see clouds? Is it windy?"**

Read Aloud Pick a book from the suggested book list on the weather.

Table Talk: What is Climate?
In this conversation, you will talk to your child(ren) about climate. Climate is the weather's personality in a location. The weather might vary day-to-day, but on the whole, the climate (personality) is what you can expect the weather to be like in that location. You will want a globe for this discussion on climate zones.

"Climate is the typical weather expected in a location. Weather changes daily, but climate is the long-term pattern of weather in a location. The climate in the desert is hot and dry. That's the average weather for a desert. In Antarctica, the climate is cold and dry. What is the climate like where we live? What is the expected weather for this area?"

On a globe, show your child(ren) these three general climate zones on Earth:

- **Tropical Zone:** Located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn along the Equator, this zone generally has warm weather year-round and is very rainy.
- **Polar Zones:** Located at each pole, these areas are extremely cold and have harsh weather.
- **Temperate Zone:** Located between the polar and tropical zones, this area generally has moderate temperatures and experiences four distinct seasons.

Copywork
Pick from one of the following three copywork options:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Climate	Climate is the expected weather.	Climate is the typical weather of a location. Climate can change over time.

Science: Will It Blow in the Wind?
"How does wind impact life?" Write the guiding question on a whiteboard.

Today's activity has two parts. First, you will discuss wind, noting that it is one of the six elements of weather. Next, you will do a hands-on activity testing how objects react in the wind.

Part 1: Discussion
Scan the QR code to view a short video on wind.

Scan to watch a short video on wind

(Continued on next page)

WEEK 1 - DAY 2
Exploring Weather

Continued: Will it Blow in the Wind?
After watching the video, discuss wind with your child(ren). Here is some important information for them to know about this element of weather:

-Wind is moving air caused by the uneven heating of the Earth.
-Wind impacts daily life in ways like clothing choices and comfort level.
-Wind has environmental impacts: it pollinates, erodes, and gives energy.
-Wind can vary from gentle breezes to life-threatening hurricanes.

Part 2: Experimenting with Wind
Today's activity invites your child(ren) to create their own wind and test its power, all while introducing the scientific method.

Each child will need the "Experimenting with Wind" printable, a pencil, and a straw. Pick seven items in your house for them to test in this experiment (suggestions: tissue, block, marker, leaf, ball, stuffed animal, book). They will test these seven objects in windy conditions today to see how they behave.

Next, talk about the scientific method. **"We are going to be scientists today and do a wind experiment. To make sure we get the best data possible, we will use something called the scientific method. The scientific method is a process that has been used by scientists for hundreds of years to collect information."**

Show your child(ren) the "Experimenting with Wind" printable. **"All experiments start with a question. Our question for today and the purpose of our experiment is to find out, 'Does wind impact all objects in the same way?'"**

Let your child(ren) work with you or independently to write the name of each item being tested in the correct column.

"Before starting the experiment, we need to make a hypothesis about each item. 'Hypothesis' is a fancy word for 'taking a guess.' We are guessing whether the object will be impacted (move) in the wind." Have your child(ren) make their predictions.

Give your child(ren) a straw and let them test each item, then record their observations (example: "The tissue flew!").

You can add more variables into this experiment. Here are some suggestions: Will an object move if two or three people blow on it together? What if it was more powerful wind (hair dryer or fan)? Does the direction the wind is coming from make a difference?

Circle back: Close this experiment by walking back through the scientific method: question, hypothesis, procedure, observation, and end with the conclusion. Does wind impact all objects in the same way?

Experimenting with Wind

Name of Object	Prediction	Results

Supplies
-"Experimenting with Wind" printable (1 per child)
-Pencil
-Straw
-Items to test (tissue, block, marker, leaf, ball, stuffed animal, book, etc.)

Optional: Is it Windy Today?
If there is wind outside, head off on a walk and watch the real world be impacted by real wind. How do the leaves move? Are the clouds moving? What else is affected by the wind?

Week 1: Weather 9 Offshoots Learning, LLC © 2026

2. Time for a **read aloud**—pick from the books you collected for the unit.

4. Today's **language arts** focus is copywork. Notice the leveled options for different learners.

6. The **supply list** for this activity

8. An **optional lesson or extension** is often included

Knowledge Portfolio

At the end of each week, the Day 4 Hands-On Activity will involve your child adding to their ongoing Knowledge Portfolio. A what? A knowledge portfolio? This is our shorthand way of saying, "A journaling exercise and writing prompt designed to allow kids to synthesize the learning from the week in their own way and in their own words, as well as to create a wonderful collection of learning done throughout the Offshoots program." That's a lot of words and would've been a long title for this section, so we went with Knowledge Portfolio for short. Each child builds their own Knowledge Portfolio throughout the program, watching it grow with every unit they complete.

WEEK 4 - DAY 4
Water Cycle

Knowledge Portfolio: Interview a Droplet

Today, your child(ren) will work in their Knowledge Portfolio to imagine they are a meteorologist who has the opportunity of a lifetime to interview a water droplet.

"Have you ever thought about how old water is? Because water on Earth is part of a continuous water cycle, the water we see today is billions of years old and has been recycled throughout time. Imagine what these droplets have been a part of, their life, and the changes to Earth they have witnessed. If you could interview a water droplet, what would you ask it?"

Start by titling the page "My Interview with a Droplet " (this can be done by you or by the child). In this journal page, have your child(ren) write questions for the water droplet. These could be questions about the droplet's favorite part of the water cycle, its favorite place to collect (a puddle, a lake, or a water park), or things the water droplet has experienced in history (like the dinosaurs, the Ice Age, or the building of the pyramids).

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Dictation. Write down your child's questions for the water droplet. Have them draw a picture to match.	Work together to write three questions for the water droplet. Have them draw a picture to match.	Independently write 3-5 questions for the water droplet. Have them draw a picture to match.

How to Create a Knowledge Portfolio

You'll notice three leveled options as you glance at each Knowledge Portfolio activity. This was done with intention and speaks to the overall format of Offshoots. While the learning remains the same regardless of a child's developmental level, the application of learning can and should look different. Some learners may be ready to write and illustrate independently (we've called this Level 2 or Level 3, depending on the activity). Others may be more successful with support from their adult (often noted as Level 1 or Level 2).

In the supply list on the Offshoots website, we linked a spiral journal with blank pages that worked great for our kids as their Knowledge Portfolios. Any blank notebook will work. You will need one per child.

As you complete more units, your child will have a beautifully created memory book and keepsake of their “schoolwork.” This can serve as fantastic proof of learning if you need one.

A Gentle Reminder

Please don't push your child to write independently in this activity if they are not ready. The emphasis is on recalling information, processing ideas, and self-expression, not handwriting or spelling practice. Dictation, with the adult doing the handwriting, is a great option. Typing, printing, and pasting—they work, too.

Another Optional Use

You are also welcome to use the Knowledge Portfolio to store any additional art projects, completed printables, poems, T-charts, Venn Diagrams, etc., that your family creates together during Offshoots. We always recommend dating each page so you can see how far you've come and how much you've covered. Think of the Knowledge Portfolio as a growing reflection of your child and family's knowledge. This is a place to hold and keep the learning in a tangible, easy-to-save way.

Dictionary Portfolio

Another growing document built into Offshoots is the Dictionary Portfolio. Vocabulary is a significant focus of Offshoots, providing children with foundational background knowledge that is transferable to other complex topics later in life. Day 4 of each week begins with time to work on the Dictionary Portfolio. The Dictionary Portfolio is created by the family together.

Why the Emphasis on Vocabulary?

Vocabulary is vital for reading comprehension, concept development, and reasoning. Many vocabulary words are highly transferable. Learning a word like rotation in the Solar System unit connects easily to math and geometry, simple machines, cooking, coding, dance, and even sports.

Introducing rich, complex terms in the elementary years has a lasting impact on all areas of learning. Vocabulary doesn't just support understanding. It builds it.

Using the Vocabulary Cards

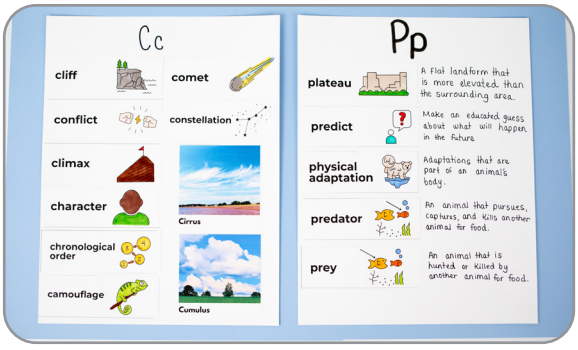
Your family will use a vocabulary sheet from the Family Printables Packet each week. These vocabulary cards can be cut out or viewed on the full-page sheet. On Day 1 of the week, you'll introduce most of the week's terms. (Some words may appear later in the week's lessons, so check the notes included at the start of each vocabulary section.)

These terms will be revisited and applied throughout the week, helping children connect the words to real ideas and experiences. Mastery isn't the goal. This is about exposure to rich language and building a strong foundation for future learning. On Day 4, you'll add the vocabulary cards to your family's Dictionary Portfolio.

Different Ways to Build the Dictionary Portfolio

A straightforward option is to paste each vocabulary card onto an alphabetized sheet of paper and slide it into a clear sleeve. Add these to a 3-ring binder to create your family's Offshoots dictionary. Keep the binder accessible so children can flip through it and "read" their growing collection of words. This is a cumulative dictionary. You'll add to each page as you complete more units. You might add your own definitions or use the ones in the program. These can be written by you or by a child who's ready for that level of writing. If you have multiple children, consider printing extra vocabulary cards so each child can create their own personalized Dictionary Portfolio.

Option 1: Paste the vocabulary cards on paper and color the icons to help readers and nonreaders.



Option 2: Paste the vocabulary cards on paper and add the definitions from the program

Multimedia in Offshoots

Multimedia is a key component of Offshoots—not as screen time filler, but as a purposeful way to deepen and enrich learning. Children understand best when they experience information in multiple ways. Thoughtfully chosen videos bring concepts to life. Curated images build visual understanding. Music and fine arts expand ideas beyond the page.

Every piece of media in Offshoots was selected to support comprehension and create lasting connections. When kids see, hear, and experience ideas from different angles, they engage deeply and retain more.

QR Codes

To make accessing media simple, Offshoots includes QR codes. Tap (on digital) or scan (on printed pages) to view videos, image galleries, music, and more. Captions below each QR code tell you what kind of media it links to.

These QR codes are powerful and convenient teaching tools. Instead of hunting for ten images of camouflaged animals or finding a video of fossils, you can scan a single code and instantly open a curated gallery or carefully chosen video. This saves prep time and keeps lessons flowing.

Scan to visit the Offshoots Dashboard

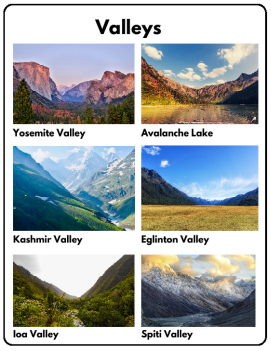
Videos

Short, meaningful videos help children grasp what books and static images can't: Jupiter's scale, the sloth's slow-motion movement, or life on another continent. Just like documentaries help adults learn, these carefully chosen videos offer children a rich, immersive learning experience.

"Scan-to-See" Images

"Scan-to-See" images are PDFs included across the program that we created to help make teaching seamless. When you "scan to see" these, you'll find a curated set of images directly linked to the lesson, so you don't have to pause and try to come up with pictures of valleys across the world. We've done that work for you.

We also bundled these images in your unit downloads if you'd like to access them all at once. View the PDFs digitally or, if helpful, print them in color to display, add to a child's portfolio, or use them in a homemade unit book.



Fine Arts

A QR code will lead you to the fine arts piece each week—a still image of art or a video of a musical piece being performed. Make sure to pull these up at the beginning of each Art Conversation.

Playlists

The playlists we mentioned in the suggested materials are available via a QR code for each unit. These playlists feature a wide variety of songs related to the unit's theme. Consider using these playlists throughout the day, not only during Offshoots lessons.

Supplies

There's nothing worse than getting ready to teach a lesson only to realize you don't have the supplies you need. We never want to catch you off guard. Each unit has a cumulative supply list, so you can see at a quick glance what the general supplies will be for the next four weeks. We also break the cumulative supply list into week-specific lists, and finally, any activity that needs supplies also has an easy-to-locate supply list.

The Offshoots Supply List

There are a few supplies you need to have on hand to make your learning run smoothly. We call this the Offshoots Supply List. Everything on this list repeats throughout the different units. It may look like a dauntingly long list at first, but look closer. They are supplies you probably already have and always have on hand, such as pencils and a baking sheet.

Each unit needs a variety of additional, often very specific supplies to that unit's learning (like dry pasta for the Dinosaurs unit or empty tin cans for Communication & Codes). We made sure to keep the supplies in Offshoots simple, basic, and easy to find (or, again, something you probably already have).

When you see **Offshoots Supply List** referenced in each unit, these are the supplies:

Paper
-12" x 18" construction paper
-Heavy-weight art paper, such as watercolor paper
-Knowledge Portfolio book (1 per child)
-Multicolored construction paper
-White printer-style paper

Kitchen Items
-Balloons
-Baking soda
-Clear or opaque straws
-Baking sheet
-Foil
-Ice cube tray
-Liquid measuring cup
-Plastic wrap
-Plates and heat-safe bowls
-Sensory play items: sensory bin, scoops, funnels, and bowls
-Toothpicks
-Water and ice
-Wax paper
-White vinegar

Craft Supplies
-Clay or play dough
-Food coloring or liquid watercolor
-Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
-Pom pom balls
-Watercolor paint
-Washable paint and paintbrushes
-Wet glue and glue sticks

Office Supplies
-Clipboard (1 per child)
-Dictionary Portfolio binder
-Index cards
-Painter's tape or masking tape
-Pencils
-Permanent marker
-Ruler and tape measure
-Scissors
-Sticky notes
-Stopwatch
-String
-Whiteboard & dry erase markers

Links to Supplies

In your online Offshoots Dashboard, each unit includes links to a few unit-specific supplies and a full PDF of all the supplies needed for the unit. You can print that out each time you're ready to start a unit to make gathering supplies even easier.

A Reminder About Supplies

Remember that you already own most of these supplies. As you move through different units, these supplies often repeat. In many situations, you can also modify, use what you have, and the activities will still work.

Book Lists

It can be daunting to see a long book list at the start of a curriculum and wonder, "Do I really need to own all these books? Do I need to find every title? How will we access what the program wants us to read?" Let's start with the most important part of the book lists in Offshoots: They're recommendations. They're just suggestions.

Every Offshoots lesson includes time for a daily read-aloud—and that's on purpose. Reading together is a fantastic way to spark connection and launch learning. It's an easy, meaningful way to open a lesson and deepen understanding across subjects, *but you choose the book each day based on what you have available.*

Understanding the Book Lists

Offshoots includes a wide variety of book suggestions—everything from encyclopedia-style reference books to poetry anthologies, picture books, biographies, silly stories, and serious nonfiction. There's even an optional chapter book for your family to read together that extends the unit's theme and helps weave it even more into your daily rhythm. Exposing kids to diverse genres makes them stronger readers, better writers, and deeper thinkers.

Laughing together over a solar system poem might be what helps your child remember the order of the planets. Reading about a boat trip in Vietnam, with stunning illustrations, might bring Asia to life in a way nothing else can. Different types of books offer different ways to learn, and all of them have value.

Use your library. Check out e-books. Watch high-quality read-alouds online. Borrow books from a friend. The goal isn't to find that one perfect book. The goal is to surround kids with books that help them make sense of the world, spark discussions in your home, and build meaningful connections.

Recommendations, Not Requirements

Every book listed in Offshoots is a recommendation, not a requirement. There are hundreds of amazing books on each topic, and no list could ever include them all. We've highlighted a few of our favorites for each unit as a jumping-off point.

As you prepare for a unit, take a trip to the library. Gather books you already own. If you can't find a title we recommend, search for a read-aloud video or look for a similar book on the same topic. E-books, audiobooks, and online read-alouds all count. You don't need to try to check off the whole list. The goal is to create a culture of reading, discussion, and exploration in your home.

Don't Miss These Key Thoughts

Keep reading to your kids: Even when they can read on their own, they still need to hear your voice. As kids grow, so do the benefits of being read to. Picture books and chapter books often include vocabulary and storytelling layers that go beyond what kids can tackle independently. When we read aloud, we model fluency and expression and help kids slow down to notice things like structure, theme, and character development.

Don't dismiss picture books: It's easy to think of picture books as only a feature of early childhood, but they're meant for big kids (and many selected in this program are specifically geared to older children). Picture books introduce rich language, deeper storytelling, and explore complex topics. They're for all ages.

Again, the book lists are guides: The goal isn't to read all the books on our list. We give suggestions that we loved, and can't wait to hear what you find and love for your family.

Teaching Tips

In this final section of the Offshoots Start-Up Guide, we've included a few teaching tips to help make your family's journey even more doable and meaningful.

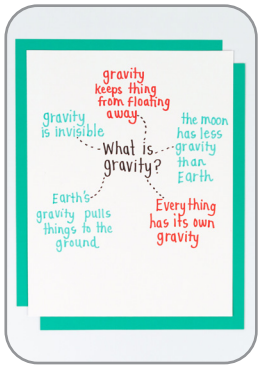
How to Create a Word Bank

In some units, you may see a call to create a quick “word bank.” A “word bank” can be a handy tool for kids who are ready to write independently but unsure of their spelling. It keeps them going with the writing flow, helps them avoid skipping complex terms due to difficult spelling, and supports their overall recall. Word banks are a necessary and valuable part of a child’s writing process and an important tool for scaffolding.

To make a word bank, work together to jot down a quick list of words the child may want to use in their writing—typically in their Knowledge Portfolio. Think of this as a brainstorming activity to get the creative juices flowing and recall important information. The word bank can be created on a whiteboard, sheet of paper, or sticky note. Remember, the goal is to give kids greater confidence and independence when working on their entry on their own. They can use bigger, meatier words without having to continually ask about spellings, which, frankly, supports everyone.

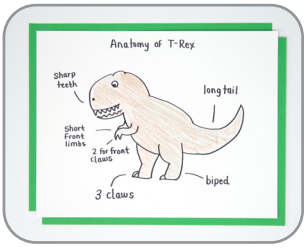
The Importance of Making Posters

As you dive into Offshoots, you'll notice many lessons include making a poster. Think of these more like learning anchors than daunting art projects. They're small visual reference tools that help kids recall and organize information. Posters in Offshoots act like annotated notes or outlines, but saying "make an annotated note sheet about Fairy Tales" doesn't have the same approachable ring as "make a poster."



Poster-making is simple—no art degree required. You're capturing what kids are learning (or will need to remember) on a large sheet of paper.

Most Offshoots posters are teacher-led and designed to help break down a lesson into digestible parts. You'll see examples on this page. While the styles vary, the basics stay the same: 1–3 word notes plus a small doodle to support understanding for both readers and non-readers.



And no, you don't need to be an artist. Simple doodles are perfect—really! Say it with us: Simple doodles. Simple doodles with a purpose. You've got this.

End of Unit Celebration

Each unit ends with a list of ideas for an end of unit celebration. You might notice we didn't say optional... Okay, while these might not be required, they are strongly encouraged. Finishing something together as a family is a big deal. Take the win. Have fun. Lean into the magic. The ideas on the celebration page range from movies to field trips to simply having root beer floats. These small moments of joy as a family can have a big, lasting impact, so have a little fun at the end of a unit and celebrate.

It's Time to Begin Offshoots

It's Time to Start the Journey

We are so excited for you to begin your first unit. May this experience with your family fill your home with amazing memories of learning and growing together.

Will you promise us one thing as you start? Cut yourself a lot of slack as you begin. This learning is new for you, not just new for your child(ren). Everyone needs some time to get into the rhythm. Let the routine settle. Find your footing in this newness. Embrace the adventure.

As you grow with Offshoots, the heart of this program will become second nature. It's okay to not know the answer to your child's big question. Discover it together. It's okay to let kids know you're learning alongside them—this models the life-long learning that we want for our kids. It's okay to pause and branch off. Some of the most beautiful learning moments don't come from lesson plans.

Remember, the goal is to grow your child(ren)'s knowledge base through hands-on experiences, connect subjects and ideas so learning never feels isolated, and—above all else—provide your family with memories and magical learning moments to carry with you.

You've got this. You really do.

But in case you need support—we're here, always. Send us an email at hello@offshootslearning.com. We'll get back to you as soon as we can, probably after following our own kids down a new offshoot of learning we took that day.