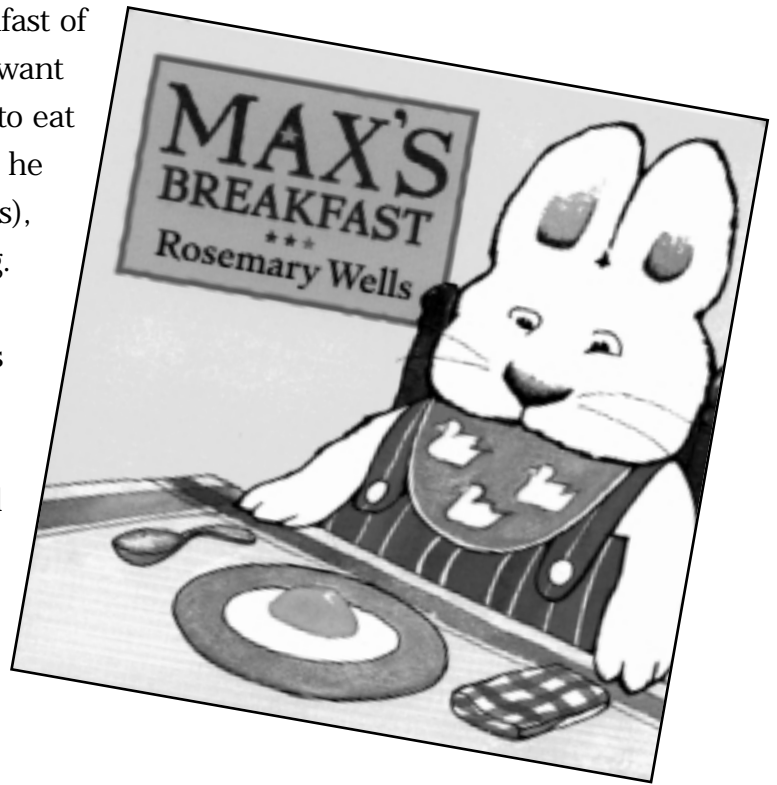


Max and his sister Ruby are eating a breakfast of eggs and strawberries. When Max doesn't want to eat his egg, Ruby tries to persuade him to eat it. Max persists in avoiding the egg (which he must finish before he gets any strawberries), and is very creative in his problem solving.

In the end, Max pops a strawberry into his mouth, but did he actually eat the egg?

There are many Max and Ruby books, and each one is as delightful as *Max's Breakfast*.



### Developmental themes

- I Am Important
- I've Got an Idea
- I Need You
- I Communicate

### Terms to think about

egocentrism: holding the view that the child is the center, object, and norm of all experience.

magical thinking: the belief that what one wishes or expects can make things really happen.

object permanence: the ability to remember that things exist even when they are out of sight, to hold a mental image of something that, for the moment, you cannot see.

### Tips on reading *Max's Breakfast* to children

Engage toddlers in a conversation about what they eat for breakfast. You might ask:

- Have you ever eaten strawberries or eggs?
- What are your favorite foods? Why?
- What foods don't you like? Why?

As you read *Max's Breakfast* to children, play up the righteous tone in Ruby's words and the defiant tone in Max's to dramatize the text.

Ask children what they think happened to the egg—did Ruby eat it? Did Max eat it? Did it fall on the floor?

## **Rhyme time**

Read "I'm A Little Teapot" on Page 70 and 71 of *Here Comes Mother Goose*.

Playact this nursery rhyme by bending one of your arms into a "handle" and another into a spout. Tip yourself sideways when the rhyme ends.

Say this rhyme as you play with a tea set. Take turns with toddlers and have them sing this rhyme as well. Put water in the teapot and let toddlers practice pouring as well.

## **How can *Max's Breakfast* help you understand the emotional and cognitive development of infants and toddlers?**

Max exemplifies the internal struggles between "good" and "bad" behavior that toddlers (and their teachers and families) deal with every day. Older sister Ruby plays the adult role as she calmly represents conscience, rules, and emotional stamina in the face of toddler limit-testing.

When Max refuses to eat his egg, Ruby attempts to set a limit: "No strawberries until the egg goes down..." This is a perfectly reasonable and frequently used line of thinking. But not to a toddler.

Toddlers are interested in getting what they want when they want it. They are not interested in delaying gratification. And they tend to see everything that happens in terms of themselves, and not from someone else's point of view. This is called egocentrism.

Therefore, Max the toddler cannot understand that he should eat the egg because it's good for him nutritionally, or that he should eat it before he eats the strawberries which he likes more, or even that he should do the thing that is least pleasing first, and save the thing that is more pleasing for last.

All he knows is what he likes and what he wants—period. And for about the next three years, egocentrism will govern the way children Max’s age interact with the world—me first and best, and most importantly, me!

When Max covers his egg with a napkin, and expects Ruby to think it disappeared, he is engaging in magical thinking. Max knows the egg didn’t disappear—he is old enough to have a solid grasp on object permanence—but he sincerely wishes that magically, Ruby will believe it did, because he so desperately wants to avoid eating it.

When Max hides under the table, he’s also using magical thinking. You can almost hear him thinking, “Maybe Ruby will forget about the dumb egg if she can’t see me anymore!”

**Magical thinking** also takes the form of “If I want it to be, then it will be.” As toddlers get to be three- and four-year olds, their magical thinking develops into a conviction that their thoughts, words and actions may cause or prevent things from happening—things that defy logic or cause and effect. For example, if a four-year-old is mad at her baby brother, and the baby then gets sick and goes to the hospital, the four-year-old may think the illness is her fault.

Finally, all of Max’s attempts not to eat the egg are primitive, although very creative, efforts at problem solving. Max has a problem—Ruby is making him eat something he doesn’t want to—and he needs to find a solution. His solutions don’t fit with our adult thinking of effective alternatives, but they are exactly the kinds of solutions that a young toddler, with a toddler’s age-appropriate emotional development, will arrive at.

Understanding the way children think, and how it differs from the way adults think is a concept that was brought to us by the child development theorist Jean Piaget. Remarkably, it wasn’t until the mid-twentieth century that we stopped seeing young children as small adults and realized that their understanding of the world is fundamentally different from that of adults.

Therefore, it’s important that adults learn to understand how children think about things.

## How can *Max's Breakfast* help you understand the social development of infants and toddlers?

Have you ever wished you had Ruby's patience while you take care of toddlers? Ruby never turns an interaction with an uncooperative toddler into a power struggle, or lets her frustration get the better of her. She may roll her eyes and try to think of another alternative—but she always tries to be consistent with the intent of the rule she's trying to enforce.

Ruby knows that she won't be able to get Max to do what she wants just by telling him to, so she moves closer and uses actions and gestures to add impact to her words. She knows that young children like Max learn by imitation and modeling, so she demonstrates eating an egg by taking a spoonful of Max's. Perhaps Ruby even knows to expect toddlers like Max to test limits.

**Limit-testing** is a common behavior of children that begins at the end of the first year and lasts well into their second year of life, and longer. Children understand that limits exist before they are able to adapt their behavior or control their impulses enough to comply with them.

"No" is a word toddlers use frequently, and it's a very powerful word. It's the word that defines them, in a way that no other word at their age can. "No" means this is what I don't want, or don't like. "No" means you can't do that to me. "No" means I know I shouldn't do this, but I want to anyway. Saying "no" is their earliest form of limit-testing—and more complex forms will follow.

But Ruby isn't an adult, and every once in a while we are reminded of that. For example, what really happens at the end of this book? Does she get Max to eat the egg so that he can finally get to pop a strawberry into his mouth? Or does she enjoy being a good egg-eating role model so much that she gets carried away and finishes it herself?

## How can you use *Max's Breakfast* in all parts of your curriculum?

### Environment

Introduce new foods to children at snack and mealtimes. Consult infant and toddler nutrition information for guidelines on when certain foods are safe to introduce.

For example, eggs and strawberries may cause allergies if introduced before the age of 12 months. But sweet potatoes, refried beans and beets are examples of foods that toddlers enjoy but may not be exposed to.

Transform the dramatic play area into a kitchen, using child-sized utensils, dishes and pretend food.

Cover a climber or table with a large cloth to encourage children to explore the spaces underneath. Everyday items can become a tent, a cave or just a fun-filled hiding place to go in and out of.

### Routines

Expect children to explore cause-and-effect during mealtimes. This is often demonstrated by a child dropping an object and an adult picking it up. Repeated exposure to cause-and-effect thinking actually diminishes the annoying behavior rather than reinforcing it. Children will do this until they are finished learning it—not until you've gotten mad enough so they will stop.

Use words like “yummy,” “delicious,” “tasty” to expand children’s vocabulary to describe foods they like. Teach children to say “No, thank you” to foods they don’t like.

With older infants, use a light cloth to cover and uncover parts of their bodies. Cover up their hands and say, “Where did your hand go?” their feet, and so on. If you try covering their faces; some children will be frightened at first. If so, stop and wait until they’ve played enough “Peek-a-Boo” to feel comfortable having their faces covered.

## Activities

Most children love Velcro. Mount poster board on the wall with pictures of food children like and affix Velcro tabs to it. Cut out identical pictures and laminate or cover them with contact paper and affix the other Velcro tab to the back of the picture. Children can practice putting the small cutout pictures on the poster board and taking them off. Older children can match the food pictures for a math concept game.

Create a flannel board by covering an 18" by 24" piece of sturdy cardboard or foam board with a piece of flannel and taping or gluing it in place. Then trace or draw two bunnies—Max and Ruby, and a plate of fried eggs, a bowl of strawberries, and a table. Retell the story in your own words, using the flannel pieces to illustrate the action. Put the flannel board and flannel figures in a spot where children can use them on their own.

Make books for each child using photographs of them at mealtimes eating foods they like. Make sure you include lots of pictures of their faces and bodies, and big, clear pictures of the food they like. Use words like “yummy” and “delicious” to tell their story.

## Observation

Notice when children understand the word “no”—what do they do with their bodies and expressions to let you know they understand what they’re saying? In what situations do children comply with the word “no,” and when do they do what they wanted to, anyway?

Record examples of individual children displaying egocentric and magical thinking. Share these examples with families and see if they notice egocentric and magical thinking at home. Let them know the significance of these types of thinking to their children’s cognitive and emotional development.

Keep track of foods children like and dislike and try to serve favorite foods often. Refer to children’s likes and dislikes often, too, but remember that children’s preferences change quickly. A toddler may avoid a certain food one day and just love it the next—and vice versa!

