



Back to SCHOOL GUIDE



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ORIGINAL AUDIO FOR CHILDREN



Dear Parents!

With school starting again, we've rounded up all of our best back-to-school content in one place. We've gathered some of our best stories (along with helpful guides on how to use them for parents and teachers). You'll also find some of our favorite back to school projects, recipes, and crafts.

This is a transitional time for little ones (not to mention parents). Routine changes can be both fun and challenging, particularly for sensitive kids. These stories, projects, and printables are designed to support children and families in ways that are enriching, developmentally appropriate, and FUN!



Access stories and links easily with this QR code! To listen free for 30 days (and access over 1400+ original Sparkle Stories), just sign up using code BACKTOSCHOOL



How to Be Super on the First Day of School



Back to School is upon us, and that likely means some changes and new routines. New things can be scary! This requires our children (especially those that are sensitive) to be very brave, flexible, industrious, and improvisational. It requires that our children be Superheroes.

This is our guide for sensitive kids who need a little superhero guidance. It's chock full of helpful tips and superhero guidelines to help navigate all the NEW and exciting and potentially scary changes.

Superhero Skills for Starting School



1. **Keep Your Eyes Open.** Look around. Listen. Notice the quiet things – the colors, the qualities of sound, the smells, the expressions. Be very curious and interested in everything. Wow, that person looks older. Wow, that is a bright and colorful lunchbox. Wow, this room smells like pizza. If your child's eyes are open, they will be more attentive to their environment than to how nervous they are feeling.
2. **Believe It.** Of all the things you have noticed – all the things you have seen, heard, smelled, and felt – notice which one makes your heart open. Perhaps it is someone's smile. Perhaps it is the smell of chocolate. Perhaps it is the clickity-clack of someone's shoes. Place all your attention on that thing that makes your heart open and let it lead you. Let your heart lead you – and BELIEVE that it will take you someplace wonderful. If you BELIEVE that your heart will take you someplace wonderful ... you might just meet your new best friend.
3. **Do Something Brave.** Now it is time to act. It is time to do something. It is time to stop attending and engage. You noticed something, your heart has led you somewhere – now it is time to step forward and take a risk. Introduce yourself. Ask a question. Pick up something that was dropped. Raise your hand. Knock on a door. Do something brave.
4. **Tell No One.** This is what makes a superhero. Heroes step into the spotlight, do their thing and then are happy to be interviewed by the press. Superheroes do it quietly and often are not noticed. They are humble. They are anonymous. So after you notice something and your heart leads you to a particular place, you do something brave. You step forward and take a risk. Immediately after you do this, step back. Step back and listen. Nod your head. Smile. Be quiet. This might look like:
 - Asking a person where they got their lunch box and then listening closely to the answer.
 - Noticing that someone is standing by themselves and saying hello.
 - Introducing yourself to the person next to you and asking them about their summer.
 - Smelling something good from someone's lunch and letting them know.

Back to School Stories (with support for parents & teachers!)

In these story guides, you'll find insight into each story, with suggestions for practical applications to support your children at the school threshold. Before you offer a story to your children, read the short points enclosed, so you understand what the story is conveying. Then invite your children to listen to the stories freely, without explanation or introduction. If a particular story seems uniquely relevant and meaningful to your child, and they ask to listen to it a second, or even third, time, definitely allow for that! For children, hearing the same words over and over can be reassuring and soothing. It can also help deepen the pedagogical and therapeutic gifts within the narrative.



Mr. Salamander



Theme: Change and Transformation

Story Description: “Mr. Salamander” is about a little girl named Cami who is to start school for the very first time. She does not want to leave her home and magical backyard to go to an unfamiliar place for first grade. As she lays by her backyard frog pond, she meets Mr. Salamander, who transforms her apprehension into excitement by telling her a story about a salamander who is quite like herself.

1. Children can have all sorts of emotions in times of change and transformation, some of them seemingly contradictory.

In this story, Cami was nervous about first grade, but she was also very curious and excited about learning. It doesn't matter what it is that we feel — the fact that we feel scared, or excited, or both is what needs to be recognized. There is room for all of these feelings!

If your child expresses a variety of emotions or confusion about contrasting feelings, be still and present, and connect with her. Reassure her that it's normal to feel a lot of different things, and invite her to make room for all of them.



2. We have so many untapped capacities inside us, and often we don't discover them until we try something new!

In this story, Amby the Nymph was delighted when she learned how to swim after she was born. This gave her the reassurance that she would learn new things when she went into the forest. Even though the pond was home, there was learning to do, and she needed to leave the pond to do it!

This is a wonderful thing to remind children if they feel concerned about not knowing how to “do” or “be” something. Try saying something like, “Remember how Amby the Nymph was able to learn so much more after she left the pond? She wouldn't have been able to do any of that if she'd stayed at home.”



3. Coming into a new, unfamiliar place can actually be fun and exciting when you are curious about it.

When we explore something with the spirit of adventure, we tend to be excited, but often when we are put into new and unfamiliar situations, we can feel nervous.

Encourage your child to approach new situations with the same spirit of exploration as Cami does with Mr. Salamander's help. What might it feel like if going to school were approached like a scavenger hunt?



Zebra Stripes

Theme: Entering a New Environment

Story Description: “Zebra Stripes” follows six-year-old Clancy. He is starting first grade this year, and he worries that he won’t fit into the class and find good friendships. Luckily, he meets an African zebra who has similar worries, and the two of them realize that everyone is unique and special in their own way, and so everyone belongs.

1. Celebrate your own uniqueness.

In the story, Clancy feels worried that the other children will not like him — particularly when he compares himself to his classmate Jeremy, and all the things Jeremy can do. He feels like he won’t be good enough! Similarly Ita, the young zebra in the Willowbee Tree, is never quite satisfied with her stripes — that is, until she compares them to all the other zebras’ stripes and discovers that every single zebra is completely unique!

How can we compare, when we are all so individual? Through Ita, Clancy also learns how to delight in his own uniqueness. If your children are looking outside of themselves for security by comparing themselves to others, remind them of Clancy’s journey. Encourage them to instead enjoy what’s wonderful and unique about themselves.

2. Together, everyone’s uniqueness makes a beautiful diversity!

In this story, every bird has its special quality and color and birdsong, and all together, those birds make up a beautiful melodic orchestra. Isn’t it the same with human beings? If your child wishes that she were “like everyone else,” or if she worries that she is “different,” then try making a mental “Life Collage” together.

Take a pause in that very moment to notice how varied the world around you is. Look at all the different trees, listen to the sound of the birds, notice taller and shorter people. Point out to your child how all these different components work together to make a beautiful piece of art, just like the song of the birds in the Willowbee Tree.

3. All people have different strengths, as well as areas where we need support.

This is true whether or not we are school-aged, and this is equally true of the young zebras showing their stripes before they start training. There is no right stripe pattern and no wrong stripe pattern, just like there is no right learning profile and no wrong learning profile.

If your child is concerned that he won’t do well or be good enough, remind her of this story, the young zebras, and all of the different stripe patterns. Remind her that teachers know that all children have their strong areas and their challenges.

4. When we are nervous about something or need help ourselves, sometimes the best “medicine” is helping others.

When Clancy supported the young zebra, Ita, he gave her the confidence that she was fine just as she was, with her beautiful stripes. By telling her that all of the zebra stripes are different but equally beautiful, he was actually saying the very thing he needed to hear himself!

If your child is showing signs of anxiety or worry, talk about others who might be feeling the same way. Then consider performing a random act of kindness for that person to add a little ease to his or her day. (And don’t be surprised if your child suggests doing for another the very thing that she needs for herself.)

Teeny the Toadlet



Theme: Change and Transformation

Story Description: Teeny is a little toadlet who is about to go to school for the very first time. When he realizes that going to Toad School includes leaving some of his friends from the pond and making new friends on land, he grows nervous. His mother reassures him that toads are lucky, because they can make new friends at Toad School while keeping their old friends from the pond.

1. It's reassuring when we learn that others, too, have experienced the things that we may think are unique to us.

In this story, Teeny and his friends know that in order to become toads, they have to first grow from tadpoles to toadlets, so that they can experience life in new ways one day as toads. Hearing the stories of others helped transform Teeny's fears of all this change into feelings of excitement.

Your child may enjoy hearing older children talk about what they loved about school, or the upcoming grade. Invite others to tell positive school experiences, particularly if they too felt nervous at first but then found themselves at ease. Remember your own stories of school days, and share those too!



2. In big transition times, children need extra rest.

We all do! Teeny's mama knew this when she told him that what he needed more than anything was some sleep.

Find extra pauses for children in the afternoon hours. Start bedtime early with special soothing routines. Take your own deep breaths as parents, and create more times of stillness so that your children can enjoy the peace this brings. And if they are resistant to rest, remind them about Teeny!



3. Exploring new relationships is also an adventure!

Teeny was very frightened to be separated from his friends, but he may not have gotten to know Zipsy and Popper as well as he did, had he been with his other friends whom he already knew.

If your child expresses apprehension about being around all new people, remind him about Teeny's experience and what a great adventure it can be to meet new people.



The Schoolmaster

Theme: Entering a New Environment

Story Description: In the story "The Schoolmaster," a boy named Micajah is looking for a teacher. His family has moved many times: from Concord, New Hampshire to Buffalo, New York to Rapid City, South Dakota to Denver, Colorado and finally to San Mateo, California. In California, he attends the one-room schoolhouse of a teacher named Master Simon. Master Simon enraptures the class with a magical geography lesson that draws Micajah into the fold and brings a sense of belonging to the whole class.

1. When we enter new situations, it can be helpful to bring proper closure to the one that we are about to leave.

Micajah felt it was important to say "goodbye" to his teacher, Miss Victoria, and even though she was not home, he left her a little note. That was his way of saying "thank you" to her, and with that, he could move on.

If your child is moving from one school to another, it can be helpful not only to say a clear goodbye to friends and teachers, but it can also be nice to pause and reflect on the previous experience. What did you enjoy about that school? What was a favorite thing you learned? And then invite your child to be grateful for the gifts of that time and place.



2. When we are entering new situations, it can be helpful to break down the tasks asked of us into smaller, more doable increments.

When Micajah came into Master Simon's school, there was so much that was new, but Master Simon reassured him that they could take it step by-step. First things first. Micajah's first task was to sit in his new desk, and soon enough all the rest would come.

If your child is overwhelmed by all that comes with the first days of school, help him break things down into smaller tasks. Sometimes it helps to list the steps! "The night before school, we will make your lunch, lay out your clothes for the next day, and get to bed early with extra snuggles for a good night's sleep." This not only reassures your child but also gives him something to refer to if overwhelm sets in again.



3. We are more alike than we are different.

In the story, Master Simon helped Micajah adjust to a new situation by reminding the other children what it was like for them to enter a new school. Also in studying geography together, the children could see that even though they were all from different places, they shared something in common because, if for no other reason, they were all in the same place at this moment.

If your child is feeling a sense of being on the outside at school, remind her of how much she has in common with her peers. Identify some ways in which they are all the same, so she can find confidence and enjoyment in the commonalities they share collectively.



Back to School Projects

In this season of back to school, we are all looking for ways to encourage our children as they settle into their new routines. That's why we've gathered some of our best crafts and projects to support families during this transitional time, and offer a little sparkly fun. The best part? Each project is connected to a Sparkle Story! Use these as a way to help children remember the confidence, curiosity and excitement they experienced through the characters in the stories.



Salamander Pencil Pouch Patch

- ★ Salamander pattern
- ★ Scrap of white cotton fabric (about a 12-inch square)
- ★ Tape
- ★ Thin-pointed sharpie
- ★ Paint (washable or not, to suit the object you intend to put the patch on)
- ★ 1 piece of craft felt
- ★ Embroidery hoop
- ★ Embroidery floss
- ★ Embroidery needle
- ★ Sharp scissors
- ★ Fabric glue or sewing supplies



1. Tape the salamander pattern to a bright window, then tape the white fabric over the top. Use the sharpie to trace the salamander onto the white fabric.
2. Being sure to protect the surface underneath, lay the white fabric out so that your child can paint the salamander. If you intend to put the patch on an item you might launder, be sure to use paint that won't wash out.
3. Once the salamander is completely dry, make a stack—craft felt below, white salamander fabric on top—in an embroidery hoop.
4. Thread a needle with embroidery floss, then use it to stitch around the outline of the salamander.
5. Remove the fabric from the embroidery hoop, then use the sharp scissors to clip away the white fabric up to about a quarter of an inch away from the stitches that make up the salamander outline. Be super careful not to cut into the stitches themselves or the felt below; you'll have to start over if you do, and that's no fun!
6. Once the trimming is done, use a straight edge to mark a rectangle (or an oval or whatever shape you want) around the salamander on the felt. Cut the felt on the line you just made, and your patch will be ready to go.
7. If you're putting this patch onto a backpack or lunchbox, you may be able to just sew it on if you prefer. On smaller objects, like a pencil case, I recommend using fabric glue, because there's often not enough room to get your hand inside to make sewing workable.
8. Either way, we hope your kiddo enjoys this small reminder of all the adventures that can come when you're brave enough to head out to somewhere new.

Shrinky Dink Self Portrait Zipper Pulls

- ★ A photograph of your child
- ★ Photo editing software (Photoshop, Prisma, Canva, etc.) capable of turning the photo into a sketch
- ★ 1 piece shrinky dink "Ruff N' Ready" plastic
- ★ Colored pencils
- ★ Baking sheet
- ★ Parchment paper
- ★ Hole punch
- ★ 8-inches of leather cord
- ★ 2 jump rings
- ★ Several large beads (or pom pom beads)
- ★ Pliers

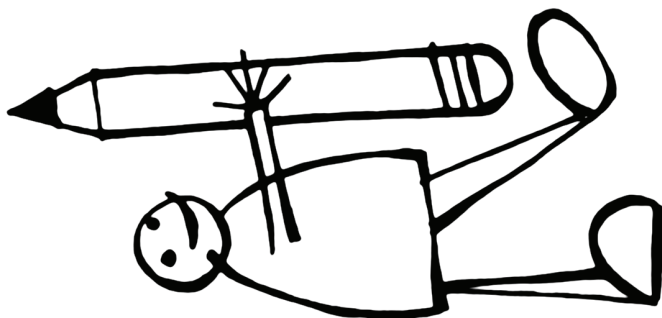
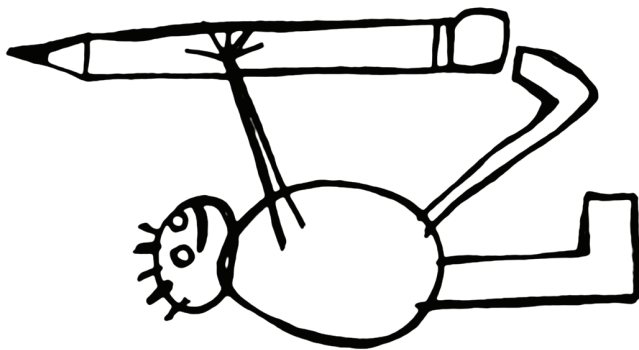
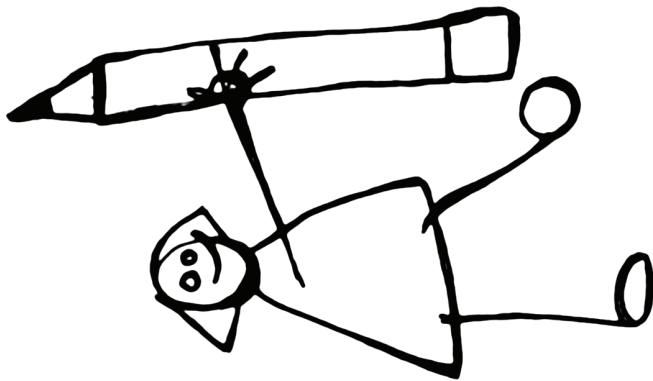


1. Start with a favorite digital photo of your child, and use photo editing software to turn the photo into a sketch. (I used Prisma, and was able to do it all on my phone.) Then, print the sketch or have it printed by a photo lab. Remember, the end product will shrink to about 1/4th the original size, so I suggest starting with a 5x7.
2. Once you have your photo and other supplies all ready, preheat your oven to 350 degrees and cover a bake sheet with a piece of parchment paper.
3. Now, tape the photo to a good drawing surface, and tape a piece of the shrinky dink plastic over the top, making sure the rough side of the plastic is facing up.
4. Use a black colored pencil to trace the sketched photo onto the plastic, then use other colored pencils to color the portrait in. We wanted to use ours as labels, so we wrote our names on them, too.
5. Once the portrait is colored-in to your liking, trim up the edges into a square and use a hole punch to make a hole in one corner.
6. Then, place the plastic onto your prepared bake sheet, and bake for 2-3 minutes. (Make sure you have your kiddos watch at the oven window for this part, as it's a really cool process.)
7. When the time is up, remove the bake sheet from the oven, and—while the shrinky dink is still hot—use a thick towel or pot holder to carefully press it flat.
8. While the shrinky dink cools, loop an 8-inch piece of leather cord around one of the jump rings. Add a few beads and knots to your taste, then trim off any excess cord.
9. Once the shrinky dink is cool, loop a second jump ring through the hole you punched in the corner of the shrinky dink.
10. Loop the two jump rings together to complete the key chain, then attach your new self-portrait to the zipper of your favorite back pack or messenger bag.

A Better Way

In the *Martin & Sylvia: Saturdays!* story "A Better Way," Momma suggests there is a better way to organize their school supplies, like using a pencil can! You can take a regular sheet of paper and cut it in half (like this sheet along the dotted line). Then you can decorate the cover of the can however you like.

Here is what Martin and Sylvia did for their pencil cans. Draw and then adhere to an empty tin can!



PENCILS

Polymer Clay Pencil Toppers

- ★ Oven-Bake Polymer Clay (pick up a kit with various colors, or use basic clay with acrylic paint if your little one wants to get a bit more detailed)

- ★ Pencil
- ★ Baking Sheet (to dry the clay in the oven)

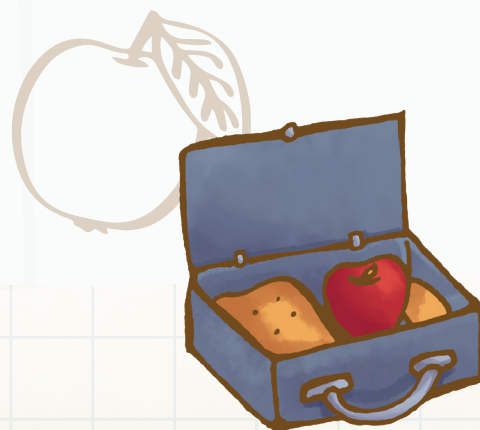


1. To start, remove the clay from its packaging and warm the clay. You can do this by placing the clay in a ziploc bag and setting it in water for 15 minutes. Or, if you're feeling silly, you can sit on it!
2. Prepare your working station. Choose a clear area and give it a good wipe down to avoid any dust or fluff from finding its way into your creations.
3. With clean hands, gently roll the clay into a ball for your character's face. Design and decorate your character! You may want to have little ones sketch out their face first so they get an idea of what they want to create. Define and style features by adding various colors of clay to your base shape, or use acrylic paint to fill in the details. Get creative, and most importantly, have fun!
4. Push the pencil into the bottom of your character to make the hole for your topper. Wiggle and shape the clay around the pencil.
5. Following the package instructions, bake your new pencil topper to cure and dry the clay. When baking, it is typically best to bake the clay longer as this builds the strength in its bond.
6. Remove from the oven and let cool.
7. You are all set with a fun, new way to personalize your school supplies. Enjoy!



Sparkle Snack & Recipes

Summer vacation is almost over and the buzz of new things is in the air. Stores have stocked their school supply sections. There are pencils and notebooks, erasers and crayons. But if you are like me, you want to make sure that your little ones have something good to eat midday to fuel all that learning they are doing. Here at Sparkle we've got lots of ideas for healthy meals and snacks. I've picked a few for you to try out. They are far from your typical PB&J. I know food allergies can be a concern for many schools so I've picked some that are nut- and dairy-free. Many of them are gluten-free as well or can be made that way.



Teeny the Toadlet Sandwich Stacker

- ★ 1 extra large (wrap size) green tortilla
- ★ a few slices of lunchmeat (ham, turkey, roast beef, etc.)
- ★ a few slices of cheese
- ★ 1 baby dill pickle
- ★ 1 olive



1. Begin by using a biscuit cutter or similarly shaped round object to cut 4 small circles out of the tortilla.
2. Layer a bit of lunchmeat and cheese on top of one of the circles, then top it with another circle.
3. Keep layering until you've used all the circles, ending with a piece of tortilla on top. The circles will stay together better if you spread the meat and cheese right up to the edges rather than concentrating it all in the center.
4. Next, use scissors to cut a pair of froggy webbed feet out of the tortilla scraps. You'll also need to cut out two small tortilla circles (just a bit wider than the circumference of your pickle) to form the base of the eyes.
5. To make the eyes, slice the pickle into rounds and cut the olive in half. Then, make two little stacks—tortilla, pickle, olive—to complete them.
6. Now, pull out your child's lunch container. Put the two feet in the bottom corners, and gently place the sandwich stack on top. Put the eyes on top of the sandwich stack, and use a knife to cut a small slit for the mouth. If you have a little extra lunch meat leftover, you can slip it into the mouth to make a tongue. Depending on the size of the lunch container you're using, you may need to use a few toothpicks to secure your masterpiece.
7. Once your toadlet is all secure and snug, pop him into a lunch box and send him off to school!



Vegetarian Pemmican

- ★ 2 cups mixed, raw nuts and seeds (I used pecans, almonds, and pumpkin seeds)
- ★ 1/2 tablespoon coconut oil
- ★ 1 1/2 cups dried fruit (I used cherries and apricots)
- ★ 1 tablespoon flax seeds
- ★ pinch salt
- ★ 1/2 cup honey
- ★ 1/4 cup water



1. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. In a large skillet, lightly toast the nuts and seeds. When the nuts smell warm, turn off the heat and stir in the coconut oil to coat the nuts.
3. Transfer the nut mixture to the bowl of a food processor and pulse several times to coarsely chop. Add the dried fruit, flax seed, and a pinch of salt, then pulse a few more times to chop and combine them. With the food processor running on low, drizzle in the honey and water.
4. Butter or spray a piece of parchment paper and press it into a small baking dish. (The one I used was roughly 9 x 7 inches.) Scrape the mixture out of the food processor and into the dish, using clean hands to press it down into the corners.
5. Bake the pemmican for 25-30 minutes, or until the edges start to turn deep brown. Allow it to cool completely in the pan, then use the parchment paper to remove it and cut it into bars.
6. Store your pemmican bars in the fridge — with parchment paper layered between them — for up to two months, or keep them in the freezer almost indefinitely.



Pizza Spirals

- ★ 1 unbaked pizza crust
- ★ 2/3 cup of your favorite tomato sauce
- ★ 7 slices ham
- ★ 1 cup shredded mozzarella
- ★ 1/2 cup pineapple chunks



1. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees.
2. Roll out the pizza dough into a large rectangle on a cutting board. Spread the tomato sauce evenly over the top, then add the ham, shredded mozzarella, and pineapple chunks. Starting at one of the longer ends, roll the dough up—think like a cinnamon roll—and then use a sharp knife to cut the roll into about 2-inch segments.
3. Arrange the rolls on parchment paper in a casserole dish, and bake for 25-30 minutes. Let them cool just a little before you dig in!



Fruit Leathers

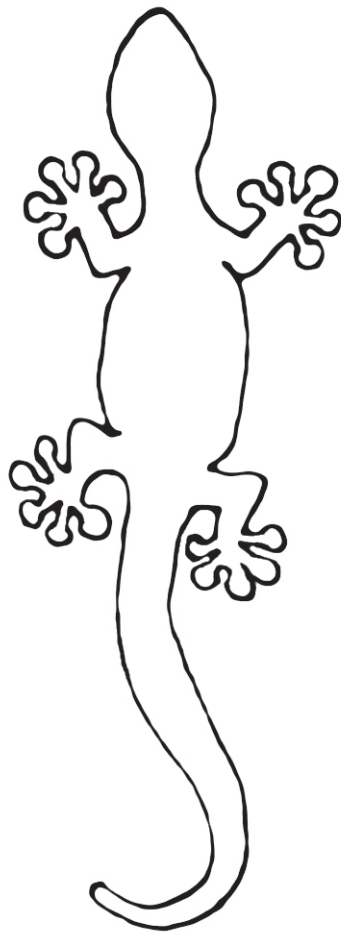
★ 4 peaches (about 2 pounds, the riper the better)



1. Preheat your oven to 200 degrees. Roughly chop the peaches, removing the pits as you do so. Use a blender to puree the peaches until they're very smooth, then spread the puree to an even thickness on a parchment lined bake sheet.
2. Allow the peaches to cook for 3-4 hours, or until the surface is no longer sticky on top. (The exact time will depend on how ripe the peaches were when you started.)
3. Pull the bake sheet out of the oven, and allow it to sit in the open for several hours or overnight. The fruit leather will seem much too crispy at first, but it will soften up as it collects moisture from the air.
4. Once the leather is pliable, use kitchen shears to cut it into long strips. Lay the strips on fresh strips of parchment, gently roll them up, and secure the rolls with tape until you're ready to enjoy.



Salamander Pattern



Libby & Dish Paper Dolls



Libby's School Wardrobe

