

Reading (and Writing) With Your Kids



Literacy is a person's ability to communicate with others by reading, speaking, listening and writing. It is a powerful tool that enables a person to make sense of the world around him. Literacy is important now, and will continue to be necessary throughout life. This power must be developed, and you, as a parent, are one of the people who have a tremendous influence on your child's literacy.

A child's literacy development should be supported and aided by the most important adults in his or her life - his parents and his teachers. When we work together to model the joys and benefits of reading, children will see that we value this activity that will play such a vital part in their lives for years to come. They will see that their parents and teachers agree on the importance of reading. They will know, by our actions, that reading is enjoyable, informative, and important. Our values will become their values, and they, too, will know that reading is a highly significant practice.

Reading aloud with children gives us many opportunities to advance a child's literacy. Through our interactions with a young child, we can:

- develop general and literacy-related vocabulary
- develop story comprehension skills
- develop an understanding of the structure of stories
- strengthen the parent-child bond
- increase word recognition skills
- develop an understanding of the writing process

The teachers in your child's school plan, research, and preview the stories they read to your children in class. They know that reading aloud to children in school is an important part of their literacy development. Parents play just as important a role in their child's literacy development. They, too, need to read aloud to their children so that the process of becoming literate can move forward. The time a parent takes to read to their child is never wasted. That time stays with the child, goes with him to school, and stays with him for the rest of his life. That time reminds the child that the most important people in his life, his parents, think that reading is a worthwhile pursuit, one that can

make them turn off the TV, put aside their work, and dedicate time to only them.



What Can You Do During a Read-Aloud?

Try to remember to do the following when you read aloud to your child:

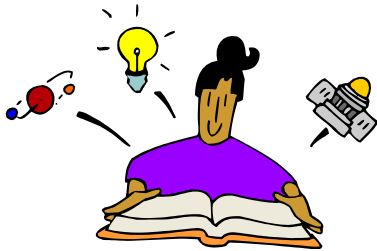
- point out the title
- point out the author
- point out the illustrator
- read the dedication, if any
- look at the cover illustration and predict what will happen in the story
- look at the story pictures before you read and predict what will happen in the story
- talk out loud about what you are doing, for example, "I'll read the words at the *top* of the page to find out what it says" or "We always start at the *front* of the book."
- move your finger under the words to show that we read from left to right
- use expression!
- let your child take the lead sometimes by letting them comment or ask questions as you read

What Can You Do After You Read Aloud to a Child?

Create a New Story

Talk about the characters in the story. Describe them, using character traits such as silly, kind, foolish, curious, or patient.

Make up a new story about the character by imagining what they might do next. For example, after reading Goldilocks and the Three Bears, tell what Goldilocks might do when she visits a zoo and sees the bears there. What will happen when she goes home and tells her parents, or goes to school and tells her classmates what happened to her? What will the bears do to repair their damages and protect themselves from future intruders?



Change One Element

The main elements of a story are the **characters, setting, problem and solution**. Try changing one of these to create a new story. For example, after reading Little Red Riding Hood, change the wolf to a pig or an eagle. How would the story be different? Change the story so Grandma lives in an apartment building instead of the woods. Could the problem be Little Red Riding Hood gets lost instead of the wolf trying to eat her? Could the wolf help her instead of trying to hurt her?

Role-playing

Act out the story with your child. For example, you take the part of the child in If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, and let your child be the mouse. You can give your child a real cookie, and they can ask for more and more things they need as a result. Maybe they can be the prince to your Cinderella, and you can dance at the ball. Or, they can be Mike Mulligan operating the steam shovel in a

race against the new gas powered steam shovel that you operate. Of course, they will win!

Rereading

Many times a child will decide that a particular story is their absolute favorite, and ask you to "read it again." Our advice is to do exactly what they asked, even if it means you both know the words by heart. This can be tedious for the parent, but the benefits to the child can be immeasurable. Often, they will begin to notice particular words, or letters, and come to know them well. What an easy way to increase a child's sight vocabulary! They also develop a love for a good story, and this increases their willingness to read on their own later in life.



Put Yourself in the Story

Connect the story to personal knowledge. Your child is able to make connections to the stories that you read to them because of their life experiences. You can help them connect the storyline to real life events or people with the use of questions like these:

Did something like this ever happen to you?

Do any of the characters remind you of anyone you know?

For example, after reading Green Eggs and Ham, you might ask

What color eggs do you eat? Would you ever eat green eggs?

Are there any foods that you do not like to eat?

Do you think green eggs taste different?

You might even find out by making green eggs!

If your child can't respond, you can make connections yourself with statements like these:

That character reminds me of..... because....

This house (family, dog, problem) is like ours because....

You can also have your child imagine themselves in the story. Read the book substituting their name for the name of the main character.

Make a Tape

Children love to listen to books on tape. An economical way to personalize this experience is to make the tapes yourself. While reading some of your child's favorite books to them, record yourself. Encourage other members of the family and relatives living far away to record stories on audiocassettes and mail them to your child. These recordings can become part of your own library and be used for reading and/or listening together opportunities. This can be done while looking at the accompanying book or listening to the tape alone. On those nights when you are not home or too tired to read aloud, listen to a book on tape and turn the book pages with your child. You'll still be reading with them. You can also use these books on tape for an extra book at bedtime, or in the car, at the babysitter's house, or when going on vacation.

Look For Patterns

Many stories, poems, and nursery rhymes include words, phrases, and sentences that are repeated throughout the text. For example, in Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?, several phrases and sentences are repeated throughout the story, making it easy for your child to predict what words come next, and join in reading with you. You can even stop reading, and let them take over!

Ask Questions

Good readers ask questions while they read. Model your own questions for your child, and they will soon do the same. Some ways to share your questions might be:

I wonder why.....

What if.....

What do you think will happen next?

Try Nonfiction and Poetry

Children love to learn about the world around them, and there are many excellent nonfiction titles that can help children learn how these information books are different from stories.

They usually have excellent pictures, too.

Poetry's rhythms and rhymes are always enjoyable. Many are humorous, or use language in ways that make you think differently about something, or paint pictures in your head. Many are also short, and children who may find it difficult to sit for a longer story may willingly sit for a few short poems.



By following some of the above suggestions, you will be helping your child to understand more of what he/she reads, and to make more sense of what children are asked to do in school. We are not asking you to teach your child to read, but to help them be prepared for instruction. You are part of our team, and we commend and appreciate your efforts in the education of your child.

Writing With Your Kids



The ability to write is an essential component of a child's literacy development. We communicate our thoughts and opinions, express our feelings, and record information and ideas by writing. Many everyday tasks demand that we write.

There is a strong link between reading and writing. When we read stories to children, we identify the author to help reinforce the idea that what we are about to read was once written by someone. Children need to know that writing is "talk written down", and that their talk, and their ideas can be written down for someone else to read.

Just as reading aloud to our children shows them how reading is done, writing with children shows them how to write, why we write, and that writing is an important part of a literate life. When we get our children's ideas down on paper, we show them that their ideas have value, and are worthy of reading again and again.



Writing development is a slow process. It requires the loving, patient support of family members, just as learning to talk does. The infant's first efforts to talk are not equal to an adult's accepted standard of speech, nor will a child's beginning experiences with writing be close to anything an adult would consider "real writing." Baby's first words are met with joy, praise and encouragement, and they should be. We know that those first words, while not up to an adult standard, are just a beginning; we trust that they will learn to speak correctly.

Your preschooler's first scribbles should also be met with enthusiasm and applause. Those scribbles are the written equivalent of their first spoken words. Trust that they will learn to write more correctly. Encourage them. Give them opportunities and reasons to write. Let them see you writing. You are their role model, and they will value what you value. They will do what you do.



What Should a Young Child's Writing Look Like?

Emerging

- uncontrolled or unidentifiable scribbling

Pictorial

- Draws a somewhat recognizable picture
- Tells about drawing.

Precommunicative

- Writes letter-like forms
- May include random letters and/or letter strings randomly placed on page
- Attempts to read message
- Writes own name or occasional known word

Semi-Phonetic

- Writes one or more letters to represent every word
- Writes from left to right and top to bottom
- May reverse some letters
- Correctly uses some letters to match sounds
- Spells some high frequency words correctly
- Writes at least one sentence

Phonetic

- Uses both upper and lower case letters
- Writes from left to right and top to bottom
- May reverse some letters

- Uses logical phonetic spelling; most sounds in words are represented by a letter
- Includes some vowels (often incorrectly)
- Spells some high frequency words correctly
- Separates words with spaces, dots, or dashes
- Writes two or more sentences on a related topic or theme

Transitional

- Correctly spells many high frequency words used in sentences
- Uses logical phonetic spelling including vowels in most syllables (may be incorrect)
- Capitalizes beginning word in sentence, names and the pronoun "I"; lower case letters used appropriately
- Correctly uses periods and question marks
- Uses regular verb endings
- Writes three or more sentences on a related topic or theme

Conventional

- Correctly spells most high frequency words used in sentences
- Uses logical phonetic spelling (including logical choices of vowels) in most syllables
- Accurately capitalizes first word in sentence, pronoun "I", proper nouns
- Accurately uses periods, question marks, exclamation marks, and commas in a series
- Accurately uses plurals
- Writes a paragraph on a topic or theme

How Can Reading Aloud Lead to Writing?

Many stories can provide a child with writing ideas. Here are some you might try with your child.

Continue the Story

After reading a story, ask your child to imagine that the book has just a few more pages. What would be written on those pages? What might happen next? For example, after reading Can't You Sleep, Little Bear? you might ask what might happen if Little Bear wakes up in the middle of the night. What would Big Bear do now?

Character Adventures

Draw or photocopy a favorite story character, like Clifford the Big Red Dog, or Peter Rabbit. Give your child a large sheet of paper, the character, some glue and writing tools. Have them paste the character down, and draw a scene that creates a new adventure for the character, or retells the original story. The youngest child can tell the story from their drawing, and older children can label parts of their picture, or write a few sentences about the action in the picture.

Wordless Books

Some books have no words. The story is told in the pictures. After "reading" one of these books, such as Tuesday, your child can write or dictate the words for each page of the story.

Letter Writing

Sometimes after reading a story, you might have some questions or comments about the story characters or events. Put them in a letter to the main character. Pretend to mail it. You might even write a return letter to surprise them!

Information Books

Children love nonfiction books, and quickly remember facts about favorite topics, like dinosaurs, whales or volcanoes. Give your child several sheets of paper stapled together to form a book. They can draw pictures about the facts they've learned, and write a sentence to go with each, creating their own information book.

Patterned Writing

Many stories have repetitive language. After reading, for example, The Important Book, children can easily repeat the sentence pattern that occurs throughout the book. They can follow this pattern to write their own sentences.

Writing Tools

To create excitement about the prospect of writing, have on hand a variety of papers and writing utensils. Computer paper with holiday designs, lined and unlined paper, colored paper, adding machine tapes, and poster board are just a few ideas of the kinds of paper children love to write on. Pencils are fine, but markers, crayons, gel pens, colored pencils, chalk and even paint brushes can make writing a lot more fun.

No literate home is complete with a dictionary and thesaurus. These two reference books are fundamental resources. There are many colorful, attractive children's dictionaries available in bookstores.

The Ultimate Question: What Can We Write About?

The list is truly endless, but here's a sample:

- Shopping lists
- People to invite lists
- Things to take on vacation lists
- Birthday cards
- Holiday cards
- Thank you cards
- Letters
- Signs
- Labels
- Postcards
- Stories about yourself and family members
- Stories about imaginary characters
- Stories about magazine pictures
- Stories about objects
- Stories about stuffed animals or toys
- Stories about stickers
- Forms for magazine subscriptions
- Forms to join a club
- Calendars to keep track of appointments
- Address books
- Itineraries
- Journals
- Diaries
- Complaints
- ABC books
- Captions for your photo albums
- Etc., etc., etc....



Developing Reading Skills With Your Kids

By a parent's side or on their lap, children are introduced to the joys and wonders of reading. Reading aloud helps them hear how reading should sound. They watch you and learn quite a bit. There comes a day, however, when they have to try it for themselves.

Initially, you may hear a child "pretend" read. They tell the story, making up the words to match the pictures as they go. They may say every word in the story, purely by memorization. These are wonderful practices and should be applauded.

But, there will come a day when they have to attempt to read new, unfamiliar text. What skills will they need to do this? Is reading aloud to children enough? No, it isn't. In school, many skills are taught, and parents can help their children master these skills so that they might apply them with increasing success to new and varied text.

Our goal is for all children to be able to read a variety of text fluently, with good understanding. Fluency, or the ability to read smoothly in a natural voice, can only be done when the reader knows the words. Recognizing words automatically is, therefore, an all-important goal. Reading instruction doesn't start right away with word recognition, however. There are several skills and strategies that come before this.

How Do Young Readers Learn to Recognize Words?

There are several strategies young readers can use to successfully decode unknown words. Knowing what they are can help you guide your child in using them.

Phonics

Phonics is the ability to use what is known about letter sounds and spelling patterns to recognize words. This method is sometimes called "sounding it out." It is an essential part of a complete reading program, and can serve a reader well.

It is not, however, a strategy that can be used for all new words. In the English language, there are many exceptions to the rule, so sounding it out will not produce a recognizable word, as in the case of the word "the". We don't want children to rely only on this method, because it won't always work.

The purpose of phonics instruction is to build a sight vocabulary, so that the reader doesn't have to sound out the words each time they meet them. Sight words are those words a reader knows automatically. They don't need to think about these words before saying them. Having a strong sight vocabulary allows a child to read fluently.

Picture Clues

Before we read a story, we ask children to look at the pictures. The images in a picture often match the words on the page. For example, if a child looks at a picture of a farm, they might guess that they will be reading the words *farm, cow, barn, or pigs*. They can know that they will probably not be reading the words *fish, cup, box, or paper*. When they come to an unknown word, they can look at the picture, look at the beginning sound and make a reasonable guess as to what the word might be.

Once again, this strategy should not be used alone, but rather, in conjunction with the phonics strategy. Pictures can help a child narrow down the words they expect to see on a page. Don't think of using the picture as "cheating" because we want them to learn more and more words. We want children to be independent readers, and using the picture helps them to do that. Watch your child's eyes as they read to see if they look at the pictures when they get stuck on a word.

Context Clues

Another strategy that both young and experienced readers use is context. The other words in a sentence can help your child figure out the one word they may not know. For example, in the sentence below, imagine a child does not know the word *barks*.

The dog *barks* at me.

If the child stops at the word he doesn't know, he may get stuck. If he reads past the word *barks*, and then comes back to the beginning of the sentence and rereads it, he may now say *barks* because that is what a dog does *at* him.

The successful reader will use these three strategies interchangeably, simultaneously, and consistently. We cannot assume that children will use these methods automatically; they need to be taught and reinforced until children internalize them, and can truly own them. The complexities of the English language demand that children know how to do more than "sound it out" when they come to an unknown word.



An Introduction to Phonics

Of the 26 letters in the alphabet, 5 are called vowels. These are the letters a, e, i, o, u. The letter "y" sometimes has a vowel sound. The other letters are called consonants. Most have one sound, but some have more than one (c, g).

Each vowel has at least two sounds, referred to as their short and long vowel sounds. The following lists will give examples of the most common spelling patterns for each.

Short Vowels - Generally, short vowel sounds occur when there is only one vowel in a word or syllable. The spelling pattern is:

CVC (consonant, vowel, consonant)

Examples:

Short A - hat, ran, bath, slap, rack

Short E - pet, men, shell, help, step

Short I - lip, bin, trip, chick, pinch

Short O - hot, jog, crop, shock, pond

Short U - hug, cub, thumb, stuff, grunt

Long Vowels - Generally, long vowel sounds occur when there are two vowels in a word or syllable. There are several spelling patterns for each long vowel sound.

Examples:

Long A can be spelled with these patterns:

_ai: pain, stain _a_e: cake, stale

_ay: play, day

Long E can be spelled with these patterns:

ee: seed, breeze _ea_: bean, steam

Long I can be spelled with these patterns:

_ie: pie, lie

_y: my, cry

_i_e: time, spike

Long O can be spelled with these patterns:

oa: boat, foam

_ow: bow, grow

_oe: toe, doe

_o_e: home, choke

Long U can be spelled with these patterns:

ui: suit, juicy

_u_e: tube, flute

When vowels are followed by an "r", their sound often changes.

_ar: party, star

_or: north, born

_er, _ir, _ur: fern, first, fur

Vowels can combine to form new sounds, as they do in:

_au, _aw: caught, saw

_oi, _oy: noise, boy

_ow, _ou: cow, out

_ew: new, blew

Consonants also combine in the following blends:

bl: bless, blue, blonde

cl: clam, clue, class

fl: flower, flash, flame

gl: glue, glove, glimmer

pl: plaid, place, plant

br: brand, brown, breed

cr: crane, crazy, cry

dr: drip, drum, drill

fr: frown, frame, froze

gr: grade, grip, grown

pr: press, prize, proud

tr: tray, train, trim

sc: scare, scab, score

sk: skin, skunk, skill

sl: slam, slide, sleep

sm: smoke, smell, small

sn: snow, snake, snail

sp: spin, spell, speak

scr: scrub, scream

spl: splash, splint

spr: spring, spray

squ: squeeze, squirrel

str: stripe, straw

Consonant blends can also occur at the end of a word, as they do in *fast, jump, desk, clasp, and tent*.

The consonant digraphs are two consonants that create a new sound:

ch - chin, church, chase

sh - sharp, sheep, shower

th - thumb, this, think

When Readers Come to Words They Don't Know . . .

Good listeners can . . .

- Pay close attention to the reader's error
- Ask "Does that sound right?"
- Give the reader time to fix the mistake
- Fix only important mistakes that interfere with the meaning of the story
- Suggest a strategy (letters, pictures, context)
- Praise the reader's efforts
- Ask them if you can tell them the word, if they are still stuck