

# Cultivating Readers

## Making Reading Active and Fun!



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

Tips to grow reading skills for ages:

Birth to Two

Three to Five

Six to Eight



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# Oh! How Readers Grow!

**Children's reading skills grow**, just like their physical abilities. Your child's motivation to learn is nourished by the everyday experiences she has with you—experiences that include talking, reading and writing.

Babies are born ready to learn, and you provide the opportunities! Responding when your baby makes sounds—crying, babbling or cooing—provides the foundation for learning to talk. Learning to talk is one of the most important skills for children to develop during the early years. Infants and toddlers learn from everything around them. They want to imitate what they hear you say and do. These experiences help them become successful readers later on.

As children get a little older, their everyday experiences can help them begin to read. From taking a walk and describing all the things they see to scribbling with crayons and scrap paper, your child is building important skills like vocabulary and early writing. Preschool children enjoy having fun with language—making up rhymes, singing songs, and talking about the books you read together.

Starting elementary school is an exciting time for children. They are looking forward to learning to read and having you as their special partner in learning. Keep on talking, reading and writing together. Encourage your child to tell you about what she is learning. What subjects interest her? Talk with her teachers for suggestions about supporting her learning at home.

Just like adults, children learn best when they are having fun! Keep the activities you do with your child playful and part of your everyday routine. Your child will learn without even realizing it!



# Birth to Two

## Baby Talk

Children crawl before they walk. They learn language before they read. The loving relationship that grows when you share stories, songs and rhymes with your baby or toddler lasts a lifetime. Even when your baby is too young to know what a book is, he loves to hear your voice reading to him.



Talking sets the stage for learning language. Shower your baby with words. Even though he may not understand the words he's hearing, he is storing up the sounds of language. Soon he will be able to put the sounds and words together and speak them himself. Encourage your child's first words! All of these experiences add up to provide a foundation for later reading ability.

**Talk, Talk, Talk.** Talk about what you are doing and what your child is doing throughout the day. For example, describe everyday activities like changing your child's diaper, feeding your child, or giving her a bath. "It's bath time! First we need to fill the tub with water. Now, let's check to see if the water is okay, not too hot or too cold. Do we have everything we need? Here's the soap, the shampoo, a towel, and your favorite ducky." Even when your child is too young to answer your questions and talk with you, she is learning from hearing the words you say.

**Words + Words = More Words!** As your child begins to speak, encourage him by adding extra words. Children's language grows when they talk with adults who have better speaking skills and know more words. For example, if your child points to his toy and says, "Truck," add some words to what he's told you. "Yes, that's your big, red truck!" When he brings you a book and says, "book," ask him, "You've brought me a book—do you want me to read it to you?"

**Sing, Sing, Sing.** Sing rhymes like Peek-a-Boo, This Little Piggy, or other songs and chants you remember. Include motions that match the words and sing playfully. Watch to see how your child responds, reaching for your hand, giggling or smiling. Singing songs, chants and rhymes helps your child hear the different sounds of language.

**Get In Touch with Letters.** Young children like to touch things that feel different. One of the first important words your child will learn is her own name. Cut out the letters in your child's name using sandpaper, bubble wrap, thick cloth, or another material. Paste the letters to a piece of cardboard. Your child will have fun running her fingers over the letters of her name.

**What Is This?** Make a picture game using photos of things your child sees at home every day. Find pictures in magazines of real objects—a chair, a teddy bear, different foods, etc. Cover the pictures with clear contact paper. Hand your child one of the pictures and ask him if he knows what it is. When he says the word, ask him to find the object in your home and let

**When you and your child** snuggle together to share a book, reading becomes an important and happy experience for him. He'll connect the experience of reading to the warm, loving feeling of being beside you.

Here are some tips about books to share with your child from birth to age 2.

Look for books that:

- Have bold pictures in black or bright colors on a white background.
- Have no words or only one or two words on a page.
- Have stiff pages that are easy for young children to turn.
- Are made of cloth or vinyl. These are durable and easy to clean!
- Have familiar characters, actions or objects. For example, young children love to see pictures of other young children!
- Have songs, rhymes and repeating phrases that are fun to listen to.
- Have more words and detailed pictures as your child gets older.

him lead you to it. This activity increases your child's vocabulary and gives him practice using symbols. Pictures are symbols for real objects. By connecting the symbol or picture to the real thing, he is learning that a symbol can represent something real. This is an important building block for reading.

**Read, Read, Read.** Read often to your baby or toddler. She will enjoy listening to the sound of your voice and will think of reading as your special time together. Young children love to hear the same story read over and over again. That's okay! Hearing the same story helps your child recognize and remember words.

# Three to Five

## Read With Me

From listening to you read, to helping you turn the pages, to filling in the rhyming words in a story, preschool children want to be at the center of the action. Learning and reading are at the top of the list of things your child wants to do. Playing with language will continue to be an important and fun activity during the preschool years.



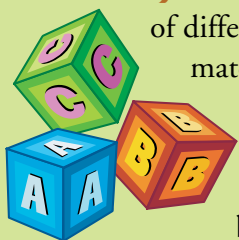
Keep talking about and sharing everyday experiences together. The more experiences your child has, the more she has to talk about. Walks in your neighborhood, trips to the grocery store, and visits with family and friends are all experiences she can describe to you. The simple things you do together now will have a big impact later!

Learning to write goes hand-in-hand with learning to read. Make sure your child has plenty of materials—crayons, pencils, markers and paper. Encourage her to draw and write notes to you. Her writing won't look like yours, but she is starting to learn to write by making scribbles and marks. And just like reading, she'll learn about writing by watching you when you write notes, lists and letters.

**Reading and Sharing.** Your preschooler is ready to be your reading partner. As you read aloud to your child, ask questions about what is happening in the story. “What do you think will happen next?” “Why do you think the monkey wants to wear a hat?” Let your child pick his favorite books to read aloud. If it’s a book you’ve read together before, ask why he picked this book and what he remembers about the story. Talk about the pictures in the book, too—can your child point to the characters or objects that are mentioned in the story?

**Rhyme Time.** Read rhyming stories and recite nursery rhymes with your child. Pause at the end of a line and let your child fill in the rhyming word. This encourages your child to listen carefully. It also helps her hear the different sounds at the beginning of words: “Jack and *Jill* went up the *hill*.” Try changing the first sound of each word to a different sound or letter. For example, “Twinkle, twinkle little star” becomes “Pinkle, pinkle pittle par.”

**My Name Is Special!** Children are often fascinated by the letters in their own name. Playing word games that are focused on the letters in your child’s name is a great way to keep him interested in learning more about language and the alphabet. Write the letters of your child’s name on a strip of paper and then carefully cut the letters apart. Put the letters into an envelope. Let your child pull out the letters and put them in order. Look for things in your home or neighborhood that start with the first letter of her name. When your child draws a picture, encourage him to “sign” his artwork. It’s okay if his first attempts don’t spell his name exactly. The important part is that he is making the connection between the sound of his name and the action of writing it down.



**My ABCs.** There are ABC books about lots of different topics. Look for ABC books that match your child’s interests—animals, foods, children’s names, different types of machines. You can also help your child make her very own alphabet book. Help her cut out pictures from magazines and paste them into a scrapbook, one picture for each letter in the alphabet. You could start by looking for one picture for each letter in her name.

**Children at this age** become more interested in letters, print and books. They can recognize many letters of the alphabet and are beginning to relate those letters to their sounds—an important skill for learning to read. Many preschool children will pretend to read books, telling the story as they move through the pages. By following along as you read to them, preschoolers soon learn that print moves from left to right.

Here are some tips about the kinds of books to share with your preschool child. Remember, though, that he may still want to read the books he loved when he was two—and that’s okay! The important part is that he has fun with reading.

Look for books that:

- Are about ideas or concepts—numbers, colors, letters, shapes.
- Have simple stories.
- Have a beat! Encourage your child to read or chant along in rhythm.
- Are about familiar subjects—family, animals, seasons.
- Have interesting characters, like young children or animals, who solve problems and get along with each other.
- Have clear, colorful pictures that match the story.
- Relate to everyday life.

**Book Time.** When you read a book with your child, take time to point out the title and the illustration on the front cover. Read the title out loud, and also read the name of the author. Let your child turn the pages as you read. Follow along with the text, running your finger under the words as you read aloud. Learning how books and print work are important early steps toward learning to read.

# Six to Eight

## New Worlds

When children start elementary school, they begin to expand their horizons beyond the world of their own home and neighborhood. Reading can help open these new worlds for your child!



Children in first, second and third grade still enjoy having fun with language. Reading aloud and talking with your child about what you read together are still very important. Children need to continue to learn about the sounds of language and how those sounds relate to letters and words. At the same time, school-age children are adding new words to their vocabulary. As they learn new words, they also begin to make meaning out of the words they can read. Soon they will be able to understand what they read, make predictions, create mental pictures, ask questions and summarize.

Not only is reading aloud to your child still important, it's also important that he has a chance to practice his own reading. Being able to read smoothly means that children don't have to work so hard to understand what they read. Be sure to spend time listening to your child read out loud. Reading the same section several times helps your child practice reading more smoothly.



**It Starts With...** School-age children still enjoy games that involve their first name. And it's important for your child to be able to hear the different sounds of language. Ask your child how many words he can think of that begin with the same sound as the first letter of his name. "Billy, ball, balloon, big, bat, boom!" Can he make up words that rhyme with his name, by changing the first sound? "Billy, chilly, dilly, filly"—it's okay if the words are *silly*! Play other games that focus on the beginning sounds of words, like a Sound Scavenger Hunt. "Let's find something that begins with the sound /b/" or "What sound does the word "ball" start with?"

**Make a List.** Ask your child to help you make lists—chores to do, errands to run, a grocery list. When your child tries to spell words as she writes, she is thinking about the relationships between sounds and letters. Children need lots of practice as they are learning to write. As your child spells words, she breaks them into parts and connects letters to the sounds of the word parts. She may try this on her own or she may ask you to spell the words for her. Her spelling knowledge will grow as she reads and writes more. Let your child cross items off your lists as you complete them, and ask her to help you find items at the store using your grocery list. Children also need to see that writing has a purpose.

**Words, Words, Words.** Words are all around us, and children need to know many words as they begin to read. As you read together, encourage your child to ask about words he doesn't know. It's okay to look them up in a dictionary. In fact, showing your child how to use a dictionary is a very useful activity! Learning words doesn't just happen when you read. Point out new words you hear on television and words you see in your community—on billboards and road signs, menus, food labels, and store advertisements. One of the best ways to help your child build a big vocabulary is to talk to him. Ask about his day at school, his friends and his favorite topics. Tell him about your day, too! The more words a child hears, the more words he will learn.

**Read, Listen, Read.** Take turns reading aloud with your child. Have



## Keep reading fun by looking

for materials that are interesting to kids—comic books, cookbooks, books about subjects they are interested in. Expose your child to different kinds of reading materials by visiting the library, bookstores, reading the newspaper together, and searching the Internet.

Here are some tips about the kinds of books to share with your school-age child. Remember that she may still enjoy reading favorite books from her earlier years, and that's okay. Encourage her also to read new books that are challenging, but not frustrating.

Look for books that:

- Have clear, easy-to-read print. As your child's reading ability grows, look for books with more challenging text.
- Are about interesting places, events and people.
- Play with sounds and language, like books that rhyme or include chants and songs. Read poetry together, too.
- Present a realistic picture of the world.
- Are non-fiction, like books about science, history, or real people.
- Have interesting pictures or artwork.

your child read part of a story, and then you read the next part. Taking turns while you read is fun for both you and your child. It's also important that your child becomes a fluent reader—so that she is able to read smoothly, without hesitating. Listening to you read will help her hear how to read with expression. Having you listen to her read helps her practice. Pick stories that give you an opportunity to change your voice, with parts you can read loudly, in a whisper, with a deep voice or a squeaky voice. Encourage your child to use her voice to act out the feelings being expressed in the story. Most of all, have fun!

# Boost Your Word Power

## A Parent's Glossary of Reading Skills

As your child's reading skills grow and when she enters school, you will probably hear many different reading terms. Below is a list of words and phrases that your child's teacher may use or that you may read about in the information sent home from school.

**Alphabet Knowledge.** It's important that children learn the names of the letters of the alphabet and, ultimately, the sounds that the letters represent. As children begin to make the connection between letters and sounds, they also begin to see that letters work together to form words—including their own name!

**Fluency.** Being able to read a passage accurately, quickly and with proper expression—fluently—means children can focus on the meaning of the words they are reading. They do not have to work so hard to figure out how to say the words. Building fluency helps children's reading comprehension.

**Oral Language.** Oral language refers to speaking and listening, but there's more to it than that! Children need oral language skills to express their needs and ideas (speaking) and to understand new information being shared (listening). In other words, oral language is an important building block for nearly all other communication, including reading and writing.

**Phonemic Awareness.** Children who know that spoken sounds work together to make words are taking the first steps in becoming successful readers. Children who have fun with spoken sounds—sorting words by their first sound, saying the first or last sound in a word, blending the separate sounds in a word and separating words into their parts—learn that words are made of sounds and that changing the sounds changes the words.

**Phonics.** Children hear the sounds of spoken language and begin to connect those sounds to the letters of written language. When children understand this relationship, they are able to recognize familiar words when they are written. They also can figure out how to pronounce and read new written words.

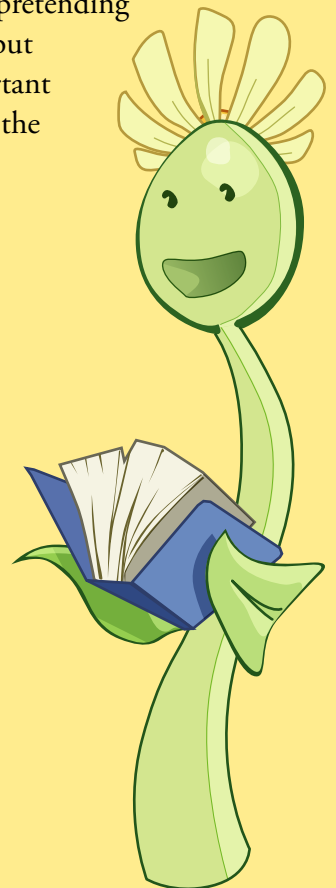
**Phonological Awareness.** Being able to hear and play with the different parts of spoken words is a skill children need as they begin to learn to read. As children start to recognize the sounds that make up words—for example, beginning sounds and ending sounds—they learn that words are made up of smaller sounds. They also learn that by changing these sounds, they can create new words.

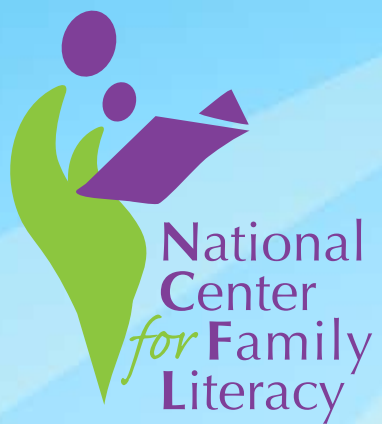
**Print Awareness.** Children need to make connections between the words they hear and the words they see in print. As children begin to explore all types of printed materials (like books, magazines and signs), they begin to see that pictures and written words represent real things. Children also need to learn how print works, including how English text moves from left to right and top to bottom on the page.

**Text Comprehension.** Making meaning of written words is necessary for understanding what we read. Children can use various strategies to help them gain meaning from what they read. For example, they can use what they already know (background knowledge) to make sense of what they read, make predictions, create mental pictures, ask questions and summarize.

**Vocabulary.** We need words to be able to communicate—listen, speak, read and write. The more words children know and understand, the better they are at expressing their own thoughts. Knowing lots of words also helps children’s reading comprehension. Children with a limited vocabulary have difficulty understanding what they read. Children learn words in two ways—by hearing and seeing words as they listen, talk and read and by having parents and teachers teach them the meanings of words.

**Writing.** Early writing is connected to reading success. Scribbling, drawing and pretending to write are the first steps. Children also may use invented spelling—getting some but not all of the letters correct or leaving out letters—as they begin to make the important connection between the sounds of language and the letters of the alphabet. One of the first words children will want to know how to write is their own name.





The National Center for Family Literacy works to create a literate nation by leveraging the power of the family.

For more information, visit [www.familit.org](http://www.familit.org) or call 1-877-FAMLIT-1.

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