

Arkansas Children's Week

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Fall in Love with Reading

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Arkansas Children's Week 2025

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Thank you for sharing your ideas, inspiration, and expertise!

Fall in Love with Reading

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Books and stories have the power to spark joy, strengthen our connections to one another, and widen our world.

When we're mindful of when and how we read with children, they eagerly anticipate story times. They discover favorite books to carry around, pore over, and page through, and they ask us to read these books again and again. The stories we share inspire rich conversations and vibrant, imaginative play, fostering positive feelings about books that can last a lifetime. This is what it looks like when children *Fall in Love with Reading!*

This year's Arkansas Children's Week celebration is about children, of course, but it's also about rekindling adults' love of books and reading. We hope you'll think about your favorite stories and the special people with whom you've shared them. It's an opportunity to celebrate the books and stories that you treasure.

In this book, we'll consider seven marvelous, meaningful roles books can play.

- Interactive books invite us to play with the rhythms and sounds of language.
- Informational books provide answers to our questions.
- Storybooks stretch our focus and fuel our imaginations.
- Picture books offer beautiful, holdable art.
- We deepen our understanding of ourselves and others through books.
- Books can strengthen our concept knowledge and understanding.
- And, we can create our own books to document our experiences and communicate our ideas.

As we take a closer look at each of these, we'll explore strategies for sharing books with children and recommended reading lists that include beloved classics and fresh, new possibilities. Our "Now Try This" pages offer ideas you can use with children right away. You'll find additional resources for families near the back of the book. Together, we'll consider timing and tone, accessibility and appeal—and our powerful, positive, long-lasting influence on young readers.

Welcome to Arkansas Children's Week 2025!

We're so glad you're here!

First Stories: Sharing Books with Babies

Our Arkansas Children's Week book is written for adults working with children of all ages. Infant educators will find book recommendations in each setting. However, some may wonder if a resource about reading has much to offer when children aren't even talking yet.

It's never too early to introduce our infants to books! Book sharing begins with newborns or even before birth. From those very first weeks, children seem to know when you're reading with them. They hear the inflection and feel the vibration of your voice, and they're lulled by the rhythm of the story. They don't fully understand the story yet, but the experience is still meaningful.

Gaynell Jamison is an author, literacy specialist, picture book collector, and lifelong reader.

When each of her grandchildren was born, Gaynell was there to read them their very first story. What a beautiful family tradition!



As infants grow to become more mobile and active, they discover that they can reach and grasp books. They may explore by patting, shaking, sliding, sitting upon, and even chewing on books. They're tough on books, but that's why books designed for this age group are sturdy and easily cleaned. All of that active exploration helps babies understand their capacity to interact with the things of their world, including books!

Because they've shared books with you, older infants show that they know how to open and close a book and turn the pages one by one. They pat and point to pictures, and they may seem to babble a story to themselves. They love to hear you read, too. There are few greater delights than snuggling in for a story in the lap of a much-loved grown-up—even if they only want to stay for a moment or two. Book times look different in the infant room and that's OK. Your warmth and flexibility help children form their first, positive associations with books and reading.

Fall in Love with Reading

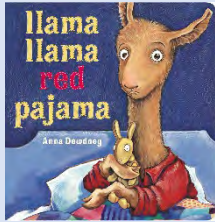
Exploring Rhythms, Sounds, and Structures of Language

Long before children read books on their own, they soak up stories that an adult reads aloud. As they listen, children become attuned to the rhythms and cadences of language, and they begin to recognize patterns and relationships between sounds and words. Put simply, they're developing an ear for the languages we share!

On the following pages, we'll use excerpts from popular picture books to highlight some ways that books help children explore language.



Books with rhyming words



“Llama llama red pajama reads a story with his mama.”

Llama Llama Red Pajama by Anna Dewdney

Rhyming stories highlight words with the same ending sound, such as *pajama* and *mama*. Adults often use a playful, sing-song tone to share rhyming stories, and children respond with giggles and smiles. As children become increasingly aware of the sounds of words, they can hear what is coming next. They lean in with anticipation and may join in on the parts they know. Because rhyming books are so much fun to read aloud, they're often favorites for children and adults alike!

Tips for Sharing Books with Rhyming Words

- Slow down to pronounce each rhyming word clearly. Invite children to join in by guessing rhyming words.
- For rhythmic stories, find a beat and read to the same “tune” each time.
- Notice aloud: “‘Fret’ and ‘yet’ have the same ending sound!”
- Make up new verses or extend stories using real-life examples. “Matt, Matt, has a blue hat!”

More Favorite Books with Rhyming Words

Board books for infants and toddlers

Little Blue Truck

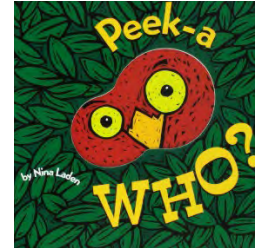
Alice Schertle and Jill McElmurry, Clarion Books, 2008

Moo! Baa! La-la-la!

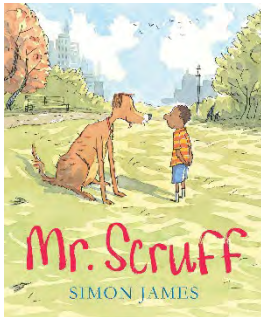
Sandra Boynton, Simon and Schuster, 2004

Peek-a-Who?

Nina Laden, Chronicle Books, 2000



Picture books for preschoolers and kindergarteners



The Gruffalo

Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, Macmillan Pub Ltd., 2001

The Scarecrow

Beth Ferry, Eric Fan, and Terry Fan, HarperCollins, 2019

Mr. Scruff

Simon James, Candlewick, 2019

Poetry books for schoolagers

Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices

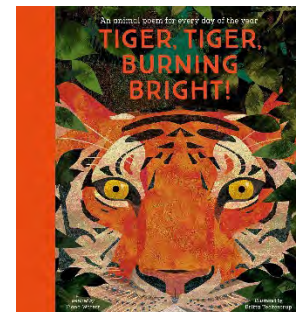
Paul Fleischman and Eric Beddows, HarperCollins, 2019

Mirror, Mirror: A Book of Reverso Poems

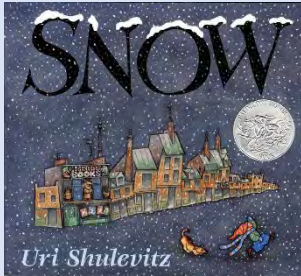
Marilyn Singer and Josee Masse, Dutton Books, 2010

Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright: An Animal Poem for Every Day of the Year

Fiona Waters and Britta Teckentrup, Nosy Crow, 2020



Books with assonance, consonance, and alliteration



“The snow swirled silently around the city.”

Snow by Uri Shulevitz

As we saw on previous pages, most rhyming books use words with the same ending sounds, like *cat*, *bat*, and *bat*. Have you noticed other ways to group similar words and play with their sounds?

Assonance is also known as *vowel rhyme*. It involves the repetition of vowel sounds in neighboring words. We can hear assonance when we read aloud the phrase, “Go slow over the road.” And, **consonance** is all about repeating the same consonant sounds. We can hear consonance in the rhyme title, *Hickory, Dickory, Dock*.

When assonance or consonance happens at the beginning of each word, that’s **alliteration**. Benjamin Bunny, Mike Mulligan, and Willy Wonka all have alliterative names, and we can find alliteration in most tongue-twister books.

These literary devices give rhythm to spoken or sung words. Stories feel catchy and seem to flow; children may bop or chant along. Many educators find that books like these are among their most popular, engaging picks for group story times!

More Favorite Books with Assonance, Consonance, and Alliteration

The Great Fuzz Frenzy

Susan Stevens Crummel and Janet Stevens, Clarion Books, 2017

Oh Say Can You Say?

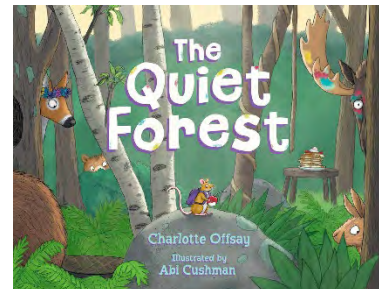
Dr. Seuss, Random House, 1979

The Quiet Forest

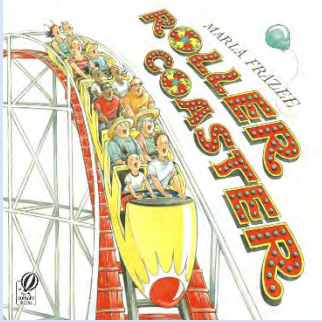
Charlotte Offsay and Abi Cushman, Simon & Schuster, 2024

Some Smug Slug

Pamela Duncan Edwards, HarperCollins, 1998



Books with onomatopoeia and other playful sounds



**“S-l-o-w-l-y the train is pulled up the hill by a chain.
Clickity, clackity, clickity, clackity. Up, up, up.”**

Roller Coaster by Marla Frazee

Bees **buzz**, thunder **booms**, and leaves **rustle**. Onomatopoeia are words that phonetically suggest the sounds they describe. They let listeners “hear” the action in the story and enable storytellers to embellish exciting, funny, or suspenseful moments. Consider how you can use dramatic effect to emphasize each of the following words in a read-aloud story.

Whoosh!

Blip!

Hiss!

Twang!

Snip! Snip!

Roar!

Zing!

Did you find that the pitch, pace, and volume of your voice changed to convey meaning? That’s onomatopoeia in action!

You may also have some favorite stories that include nonsense words. These are playful, made-up words that you won’t find in the dictionary. You and your children use other clues in the story to decide how they sound and what they might mean.

Bringing sound words to life through vibrant storytelling invites children to articulate unusual sounds. That’s good exercise for mouth muscles! It can also help them become more aware of how sounds and words can represent actions and experiences.

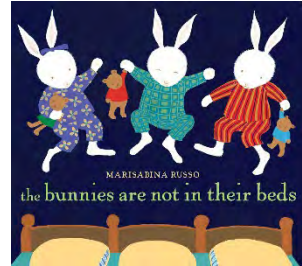
Did You Know?

Animal sounds and other onomatopoeia vary in different languages. For example, dogs bark arf-arf (English), guau-guau (Spanish), wow-wow (Cantonese), and waf-waf (Dutch). Can you make each of those sound like a real dog? Invite families and friends of your program to share animal sounds from other languages.

More Favorite Books with Onomatopoeia and Other Playful Sounds

For infants, toddlers, and preschoolers

The Bunnies are Not in Their Beds
Marisabina Russo, Schwartz & Wade, 2019



Everybody in the Red Brick Building
Anne Winter and Oge Mora, Balzer + Bray, 2021

Fire Engine No. 9
Mike Austin, Scholastic, 2017



In the Tall, Tall Grass
Denise Fleming, Henry Holt, 1991

For preschoolers, kindergarteners, and schoolagers



Double Trouble in Walla-Walla
Andrew Clements and Salvatore Murdocca, Carolrhoda Books, 1997

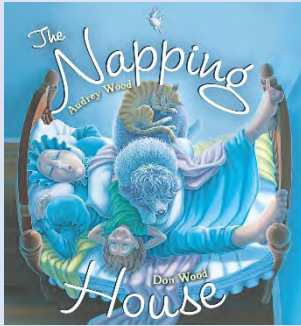
Du Iz Tak?
Carson Ellis, Candlewick, 2016

Froodle
Antoinette Portis, Roaring Book Press, 2014

Tips for Sharing Books with Onomatopoeia and Other Playful Sounds

- Ham it up! Try a rumbling voice for big, booming sounds or a high-pitched voice for little, squeaky sounds.
- Pause to invite children to try. When they seem interested, describe how you're using your mouth to create specific sounds. For example, you might notice that you puff out your cheeks or pucker your lips.
- Sounds are all around us! Invite children to use their voices to imitate interesting sounds they encounter in real life. When documenting what children say, do your best to capture their ideas about sound—even if it means spelling made-up words phonetically. (Manny said, “I hear a *skrung-skrung* sound. That’s the bullfrog!”)

Predictable, participatory books

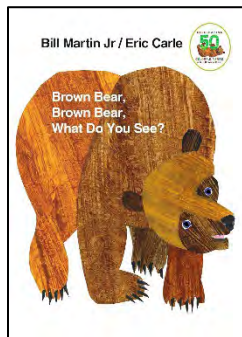


“And on that bed,
there is a granny,
a snoring granny,
on a cozy bed,
in a napping house,
where everyone is sleeping.”

The Napping House by Audrey and Don Wood

Predictable books are stories with repetitive patterns or structures. As they listen, children are able to figure out what will happen next. Because they are easy to follow and anticipate, predictable books encourage children to join in on the storytelling.

How many examples of predictable stories can you find in your book collection?



Repetitive Pattern Stories

Stories like *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* repeat a few simple lines over and over again. Once children understand the format, they can use picture cues to “read” the book on their own.

Call-and-Response Stories

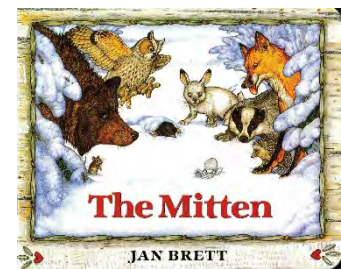
“Did Pete cry? ... Goodness no!” And, “Chicka, Chicka... Boom! Boom!” Books with a familiar refrain invite back-and-forth interactions between the reader and their audience.

Circular Stories

Stories like *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* begin and end with the same event. They come full circle in a predictable way.

Cumulative Stories

In cumulative stories, each section builds on the section before. *The Napping House* is a cumulative story, and so is *The Mitten*.



You know you have a predictable book in your hands when children naturally begin to chime in and chant along with you, or when they have that “Aha!” moment of figuring out exactly what will come next! It’s no wonder that predictable books are popular picks for group story times, especially with younger and less experienced groups.

In addition to promoting high levels of engagement, predictable books can strengthen pattern recognition and recall skills. Their illustrations provide easily recognizable clues to

help children figure out the story, and educators often observe children “reading” familiar books on their own by remembering the words that match each page. Even though they aren’t *really* reading the pages yet, they’re making important connections between spoken and written words. For all of these reasons, predictable books are a valuable part of our book collections for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers!

The right books at the right time

So, how about kindergarten and first-grade libraries? Predictable books may not be the best choice for children who are beginning to read on their own. By the time most children are six and seven, they are developing the ability to sound out words. Now, we want children to pay close attention to the words on the page. For emergent readers, **decodable books** are a better choice.

Decodable books tell simple stories (or share factual information) using words with letter-sound combinations that the reader already knows. This enables elementary-aged children to figure out words using decoding strategies, rather than guessing the story based on predictable patterns and picture clues. Decodable books aren’t meant to be engaging picks for toddler and preschool story times; they’re designed to help kindergarteners and first graders gain the skills and confidence they need to read independently.



Phonological Awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds of language. When we engage young children in playful, participatory stories described in this section, we’re helping them build vital listening and speaking skills that lay the foundation for future literacy!

Now Try This

Let's Create a Book Hospital

Young readers can be hard on books. We teach gentle book-handling skills but also recognize that accidents can happen.

Designate a box or basket to serve as your group's book hospital. Teach children to place book in the "hospital" when they notice a torn page or damaged spine. Model gentle care and concern for the damaged books.

Periodically mend your books. You can use clear Scotch and packing tape, or specialized book repair products designed for libraries. If your children are very young, they can watch as you carefully repair each book. Preschoolers and kindergarteners can assist with tape and may begin to manage it independently.

Older schoolagers can follow instructions to use binding tape and glue for book repair. If you have a multi-age group, consider a schoolage Book Repair Club to collect books, repair them, and return them to younger groups.

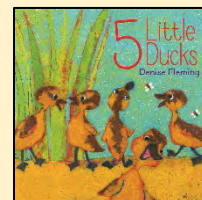
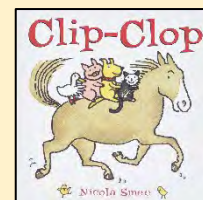
By carefully mending damaged books, you're helping children understand that they are fragile and valuable, worthy of repair.

Now Try This

Let's Bring Playful Stories to Life

Short, playful stories invite us to sing, chant, and move our bodies. Share one of the ideas below or an idea of your own.

- Gently bounce babies on your lap as you read Nicola Smee's *Clip Clop*.
- Invite toddlers to sing and move with Jane Cabrera's Sing-Along series. You can find books for *The Wheels on the Bus*, *If You're Happy and You Know It*, and more.
- Read Denise Fleming's *Five Little Ducks*. Invite five children to be the ducks. They can linger "far away" before waddling back at the end of the story.
- As you read Ellie Sandal's *Everybunny Dance*, stand up and try out all the bunny dance moves. End by hopping off to your next activity.



Finding Answers to Our Questions

"Where do butterflies go at night?"

"What are eyebrows for?"

"Is that a backhoe or an excavator?"



Children are naturally curious and full of questions about the world around them. Sitcoms and stand-up comedians may joke about exasperated adults and children asking too many questions, but the ability to ask questions is a powerful tool. By asking and receiving answers, children gather many different kinds of information.

Asking What

These questions seek information about animals, objects, and events. Basic labeling questions such as "What that?" emerge in early toddlerhood. As they grow, children seek increasingly specific answers. For example, a toddler may be satisfied with the answer, "That's a bird.," but a four-year-old may persist, asking, "Yes, but what *kind* of bird is it?" Their questions illustrate their increasing awareness of classification and categorization.

Asking Where

When a child asks "Where?" they find out about locations and places. Toddlers often want to know where familiar people or play objects have gone. In later years, they'll ask questions about the relationships between people, animals, and things and their environments. For example, a five-year-old might ask, "Where do cows go when it storms?"

Asking Who

These questions seek information about people. Younger children ask about people in pictures or the immediate environment. A two-year-old may play a "Who is that?" game with a favorite adult, pointing to each person in a photo. A kindergartener may ask more practical questions: "Who has the purple marker? I need to borrow it." Soon, children's questions become broader and more abstract. "Who came up with the idea for Oreo cookies?" Or, "Who was the first person to go into outer space?"

Asking Other Complex Questions

Here are some more questions that emerge in early childhood.

- Asking **how** to learn about processes, actions, or procedures. ("How do earthworms breathe underground?")
- Asking **why** to seek explanations and reasons behind events or phenomena. ("Why do we yawn?")
- Asking **when** to understand timelines and sequences. ("When will the robin's eggs hatch?")
- Asking **what if** to explore hypothetical possibilities and outcomes ("What if we took a helicopter to school instead of a bus?")



When we listen attentively to children's questions, we show that we value their thoughts and ideas. The ask-and-listen cycle is a valuable communication tool, and the ensuing conversations bolster vocabulary and language skills. Perhaps most importantly, we nurture curiosity and problem-solving by responding thoughtfully to children's questions.

That doesn't mean that we have to have all the answers. In fact, "I wonder how we could find out?" can be a fantastic response! The answer, quite often, can be found in a book. Informational books can help us build knowledge about every imaginable topic.

Informational books are also known as nonfiction texts. They help answer questions through a combination of facts, real photos or realistic illustrations, and diagrams, maps, or other helpful graphics. It's especially powerful to make informational books accessible to children when questions arise!

More Tips for Sharing Informational Books

1. Select high-quality books that engage children.

Look for books with clear, high-resolution photos and/or large, realistic illustrations. When the drawings and photographs in a book genuinely make you say, "Oh, wow!" you can bet that children will be captivated by them, too!

2. With longer books, zoom in on the parts that interest children most.

Informational books are often lengthy and comprehensive. They may be intended as a resource—a few pages at a time—or may be geared toward older children. They aren't meant to be read cover to cover with younger audiences. Instead, focus on the pages most closely related to your group's interests. You don't have to read those word for word, either. Adjust the content to match your children's level.

3. Consider sharing informational books with individuals or small groups of children rather than with the whole group at once.

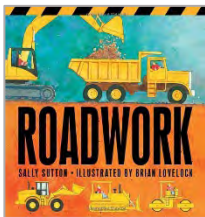
When you use a book informally with one, two, or a few children, they don't just sit and listen. They can lean in to study illustrations and point out details that have caught their eye, and you'll be able to hear and respond to each child's questions and comments.

4. Whenever possible, connect informational books to real life.

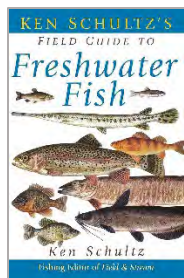
Informational books are most powerful when they support firsthand experiences. You'll find some examples below, with more suggestions on the following pages.



An infant teacher shares a board book with close-up photos of cats and dogs. She knows these are familiar to many of her children, and she talks with them about their pets at home.



Preschoolers have been eager to watch road work from their classroom window and are curious about the large, unfamiliar equipment. Their teacher borrows a book from the library to help answer their questions.



A schoolage group is planning a summer field trip to a fish hatchery. Their teacher finds a factual book about freshwater fish to help build background knowledge before they go.

Photo books for infants and toddlers

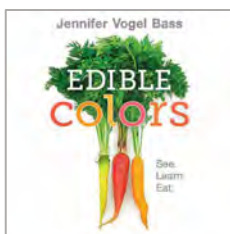
Many board books feature cute illustrations and charming stories. Does your infant/toddler book collection also include books with clear, interesting photographs?

Consider the two dogs pictured below.

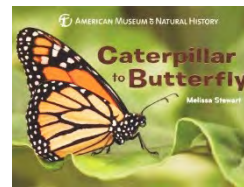


Which one gives a baby more information to think about? Which one is she more likely to connect to dogs that she has encountered in real life? While the drawing of the dog is cute and has some identifiable features, the photograph offers more to discover. By viewing this photo, a child can see many true things about actual dogs. Many educators notice that infants and toddlers lean in to look longer and show greater excitement for books with photographs.

Here are a few of our favorite photo books for infants and toddlers.



Edible Colors
Jennifer Vogel Bass,
Roaring Book Press, 2016

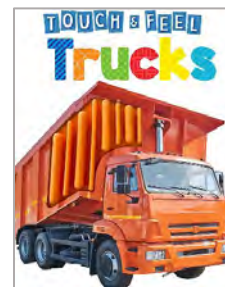


Caterpillar to Butterfly
American Museum of
Natural History, 2016



Touch and Feel Trucks
Little Hippo Books, 2021

Look & Learn series
(includes books about birds,
dogs, weather, and more)
National Geographic Kids, 2015



Informational series for preschoolers and kindergartners

These books are fun on their own but can be even more engaging when offered in conjunction with seasonal changes and other events throughout the year. Children will be excited to discover each new addition in a familiar series.

Nature Books series, Dianna Hutts Aston and Sylvia Long

These gorgeously illustrated books have earned high praise from the National Science Teaching Association, the National Council for Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, and the American Library Association!

A Beetle is Shy

A Butterfly is Patient

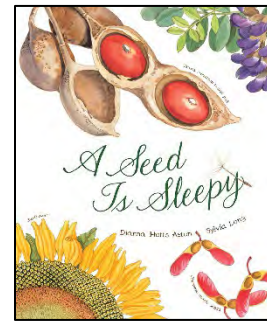
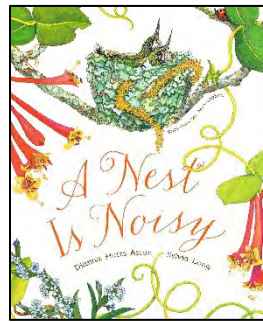
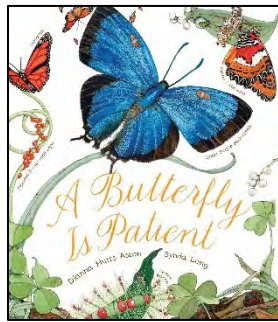
An Egg is Quiet

A Nest is Noisy

A Rock is Lively

A Seed is Sleepy

A Shell is Cozy



Weather Walk series, April Pulley Sayre

These books combine beautiful, full-page photos with simple, factual information about weather. A carefully curated bibliography in each book invites educators to build their weather-related libraries.

Best in Snow

Feel the Fog

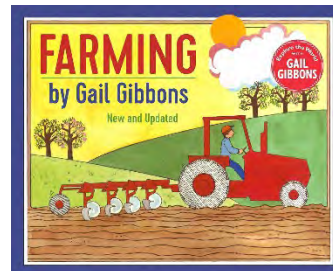
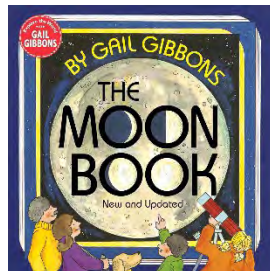
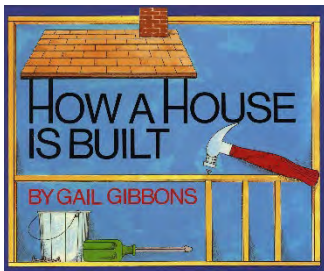
Full of Fall

Raindrops Roll

Gail Gibbons books

Gail Gibbons has created over 50 informational books for young children.

"Gail Gibbons has taught more preschoolers and early readers about the world than any other children's writer-illustrator." - The Washington Post



Life Cycles in Room 6 series, Caroline Arnold

This book series invites us into Ms. Best's kindergarten classroom to learn alongside her students. Photos capture inquiry-guided, authentic learning over weeks or months. After reading these books, you might be inspired to document your group's investigations in photos, too!



Butterflies in Room 6

Hatching Chicks in Room 6

Planting a Garden in Room 6

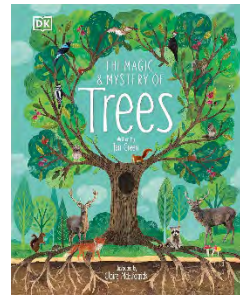
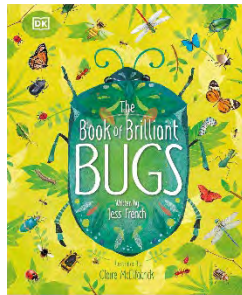
The Magic and Mystery of the Natural World series, DK Books

The content in these oversized books is geared toward older readers, but preschool-aged children will delight in the incredible illustrations. They are a great addition to an indoor nature center or an outdoor independent reading area!

The Book of Brilliant Bugs

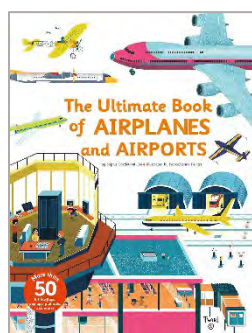
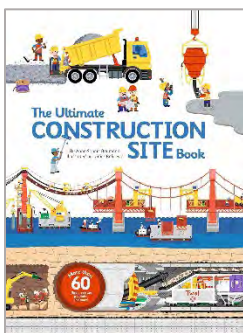
The Extraordinary World of Birds

The Magic and Mystery of Trees



Ultimate Book series, Twirl Books

These large, interactive books feature flaps to open, tabs to pull, and wheels to spin. They're loaded with factual, well-labeled diagrams about things that often interest young children. There are over a dozen topics available. Here are a few of our favorites.



The Ultimate Book of Airplanes and Airports

The Ultimate Book of Cities

The Ultimate Book of Vehicles

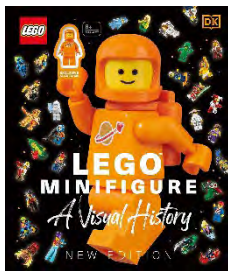
The Ultimate Construction Site Book

High-interest informational books for schoolagers

By the time they're in second grade and beyond, many young readers are ready for longer nonfiction books with fewer photos or illustrations. They may enjoy reading inspiring biographies of famous people or learning about ancient history. It's not uncommon for a schoolager to have a partially-finished book or two in their backpack.

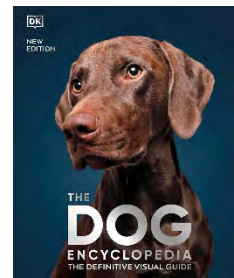
Still, the most popular informational books for summer and afterschool programs are often oversized, eye-catching books filled with photographs or appealing illustrations. Books like these are easy for busy schoolagers to pick up and put down and large enough to be pored over with friends. As a bonus, they're universally engaging for groups of varied ages and reading levels.

Here are some examples of high-interest informational books for schoolagers.

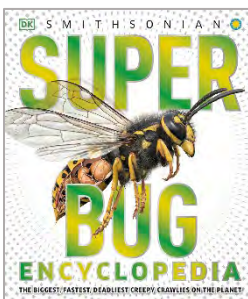


The Dog Encyclopedia
DK, 2023

Lego Minifigure: A Visual History
Gregory Farshtey, DK Children,
2020

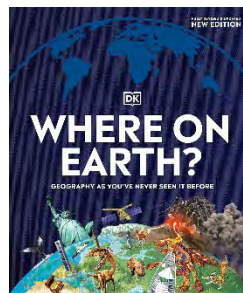
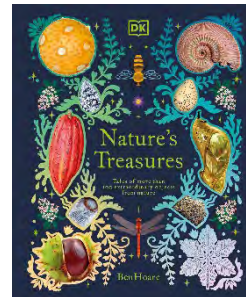


Nature's Treasures: Over 100 Extraordinary Objects
Ben Hoare, DK, 2021



Smithsonian Super Bug Encyclopedia
DK and Smithsonian Institute,
2016

*Where on Earth?:
Geography As You've Never Seen It Before*
DK, 2021



Now Try This

Let's Make a Topical Book Basket

Think of a topic that interests children and relates to the current season, program happenings, or other events in children's lives. Next, visit a library or your program's book storage area to gather several informational books related to your topic.

Here are a few examples. You'll also have other ideas of your own.

- Books about tractor-trailers, garbage trucks, and other large vehicles for toddlers who delight in spotting trucks through their playground fence.
- Books with photos of babies for a group where the teacher has a new baby or several children have new baby siblings.
- Books about flowers and pollinator insects to support springtime exploration.
- Books about school buses and school routines for children who are about to start kindergarten.
- Books about reptiles and amphibians for a schoolage group with a new pet gecko.

Arrange your book collection in a special basket or bin. Introduce it to the children and decide together where to place the basket in your room. Perhaps an informational book basket will become an ongoing tradition for your group!

Now Try This

Let's Use Informational Books in Practical Ways

Informational books can also help answer the question, "How do we...?" Model reading for practical information in one of these ways.

- Use a cookbook together to make applesauce, muffins, smoothies, or another favorite food.
- Consult a gardening book as you plan a container garden or raised garden bed. Look closely at seasonal schedules, watering guidelines, and charts that suggest how to space your plants.
- Look through a science or art activity book to find and follow a recipe for bubble solution, slime, homemade paint, or some other fun concoction.

Point out information on the page and make comments that help children notice how the book guides your work. Afterward, share your recipe or other resources with families.

Sharing Stories

"Once upon a time..."

Do you remember your favorite stories from childhood? Perhaps they were funny stories that made you giggle or suspenseful stories that brought you to the edge of your seat. Perhaps they told of grand adventures in amazing places or the everyday experiences of children like you. Our favorite storybooks became tattered and worn from being read again and again. Even today, their characters hold a special place in our memory.



Not all picture books are *storybooks*. In bookstores and libraries, storybooks share space with concept books, simple rhyming books, wordless picture books, and more. So, what makes a storybook a storybook?

- There's a storyline with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- We can identify the characters in the story and recognize the setting—the time and place where the story happens.
- There's a problem or challenge that is resolved by the end.
- Usually, there's a theme to think about together. It's a message, meaning, or big idea that helps explain why things in the story happened.

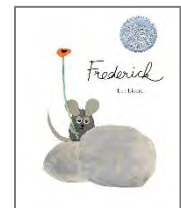
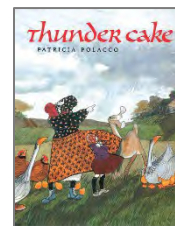
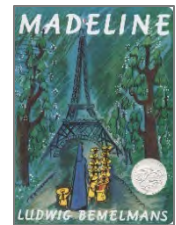
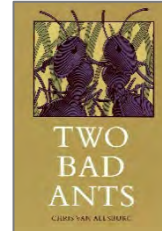
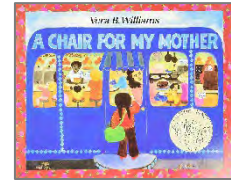
Traditional fairy tales, folk tales, and fables are stories, and you can find many modern examples, as well. Storybooks continue to hold value for today's children. Their longer narratives stretch attention span and memory, inviting children to recall key events. A child retelling the story may rattle off: "And then...and then...and then..." That's sequencing in action!

Storybooks offer lots to think about, too. Children envision unfamiliar settings and contemplate characters and events. "Where are they going?" "Why did that character do that?" Storybooks also offer rich, interesting words and complex, eloquent language patterns. It's an opportunity for children to hear and try out words and phrases beyond what they hear in everyday conversations.

Which Story Starts This Way?

Consider the lines below. Each is the very first line of a classic storybook. Can you match them to the corresponding book covers on the right?

1. "On sultry summer days at my Grandma's farm in Michigan, the air gets damp and heavy. Storm clouds drift low over the fields."
2. "All along the meadow where the cows grazed and the horses ran, there was an old stone wall."
3. "My mother works as a waitress in the Blue Tile Diner. After school sometimes, I go to meet her there."
4. "The news traveled swiftly through the tunnels of the ant world. A scout had returned with a remarkable discovery!"
5. "In an old house in Paris that was covered with vines lived twelve little girls in two straight lines."



In just the first sentence or two of these stories, writers have already offered uncommon and intriguing words! Words like *sultry*, *swiftly*, *meadow*, and *vines* don't often come up in our daily lives, so they may be unfamiliar to children. As we talk about what they mean, we're helping children build vocabulary and the ability to make sense of new words.

These opening lines also spark our interest and conjure a strong sense of place. Readers and listeners might imagine they are in that place and time as the story begins. These books may be old favorites for you, but children are hearing them with fresh ears. Those first words have caught their attention, and they're curious about how the rest of the story will go! On the following pages, you'll find tips and resources for reading stories aloud with children.

Answers 1. *Thunder Cake* 2. *Frederick* 3. *A Chair for My Mother* 4. *Two Bad Ants* 5. *Madeline*

Sharing Stories with Children

Create places for sharing stories.

Where will you gather with children for storytimes? There are many possibilities for story-sharing spaces.

- A cheerful child-sized reading area where an adult can sit comfortably, too. It's just right for individual reading with just one child or two.
- A comfy couch in a corner, with ample light from a lamp or window. It's the perfect place for snuggling in to share a story with a few young friends.
- An inviting group storytime area with a spacious rug or sit-upon spots. There's plenty of room here for a larger audience.

As you arrange each area, try sitting exactly where you will sit when you read with children. Will you be comfortable? Can you make eye contact with each listener and, if needed, see other children around the room?

Next, shift to sit exactly where children will sit while you read to them. Try spots near the front and back of your reading area. Will everyone be comfortable? Will everyone be able to see and hear easily? What do you notice about softness, roominess, aesthetics, and lighting? How might this area feel from your listeners' point of view?



By considering your story-sharing spaces carefully, you may identify minor adjustments that can make a big difference! Fine-tuning the areas where we share books with children sets the stage for successful storytimes.

Storytime with Schoolagers?

Yes! Young people don't outgrow read-aloud stories when they learn how to read on their own. Listening to an adult read invites them to relax and be present in a shared moment. A good story, masterfully read, may be one of the best parts of the day for children and adults alike!

As Newberry Medal-winning writer Katherine Paterson explained, "Read it to me is a test. Let me read it to you is a gift."

Pre-read before reading aloud to a group.

When we read with only one or two children, almost any book they pick will do. Larger group storytimes require more careful consideration. Engagement is more challenging with larger groups, and many books are not especially well-suited for sharing this way. We strive to select books that are well-matched to our group. Pre-reading is a crucial step to help storytime flow smoothly. Here are some questions you might consider when selecting books for groups.

- **Is the content safe for all children in this age group?** Read the words and study the illustrations. You can adapt the words you'll read out loud to make a book more suitable for your group, but books with questionable illustrations should be skipped.
- **Will this book be easy for a group of children to see?** Look for large, clear illustrations. High-contrast pictures, such as bold artwork on a light background, are easiest for large groups to see. Illustrations with many small details are best saved for sharing with individuals and small groups. That way, children can lean in and look closely without crowding.
- **Is the length of this book ideal for all children in this age group?** You may need to shorten long, wordy stories to match your group's attention span. Ask yourself, "How can I say this in fewer words without compromising the flow of the story?" Observe children for cues. If they seem restless by the story's end, try something a little shorter next time.

Many experts suggest reading aloud to young children for at least 20 minutes daily. This can be accomplished through group and/or individual story-sharing at home and school. The chart below offers general guidelines about the length of each session. Actual reading times should be responsive to children's experience levels and individual needs.

| Age Range | Read-Aloud Guidelines |
|--------------------------|--|
| Infants | Brief, individualized sharing based on the baby's cues. |
| Toddlers | Just a few pages, for 1-2 minutes. Children should be free to leave the story area if desired. Some children may want to linger longer. |
| Two-year-olds | 12-24 pages, for 2-5 minutes. Children should be allowed to get up and move when they want. |
| Preschoolers (3-5 years) | Up to 48 pages, for 5-15 minutes. Children's focus will grow over time if storytimes are positive and enjoyable. Many children appreciate having something to do with their hands while listening. |

- **Is this book relatable and interesting for this group of children?** Begin by considering the subject matter. A story about older children preparing for a spelling bee won't make much sense to toddlers! Then, think about whether, with your support, your group can understand the story's plot, humor, narrative devices, and so on. Publisher guidelines offer recommended age ranges that consider the story's length and the level of literary understanding required to “get it.” Pair this with what you know about the topics and styles of books that resonate with your group to find storytime hits!
- **How will I perform this story?** Try out the rhythm and cadence of the story. Look for places in the story where you might build suspense, highlight humor, or explain unfamiliar words. Consider character voices and sound effects, and look for opportunities for rich conversations and audience participation. When you're familiar with the book, you're prepared to optimize children's engagement and enjoyment.



Set the tone for a story.

World-class storyteller Jim Trelease explained, "An authoritarian 'Now stop that and settle down! Sit up straight. Pay attention!' does not create a receptive mood." Instead, invite children to join you by sparking their interest in the book. You can pitch your story to children with an intriguing introduction. For example, you might say, "I've found a story that will take us on a grand adventure to someplace we've never been before! Would you like to see?" Children will be eager to look at the book's cover with you before settling in to savor the story.

It can take a few moments for children to get comfortable and prepare to listen. If two adults are present for a group storytime, one can engage group members who are ready and waiting. Meanwhile, the second adult can quietly support individual children who need more help finding a spot or tuning in for the story. Once your group seems comfortable, look together at the book's cover. The familiar story-starting routine of pointing out the author and illustrator of the book reminds children that someone has created this story for them.



Read with enthusiasm.

The previous page describes several strategies for optimizing engagement. Strong story readers are often dramatic and animated, beginning and ending with a flourish. Try using your tone, facial expressions, and body language to convey the story's emotions. Notice how children respond by mirroring the mood you've created. The more you practice reading this way, the more natural it will become!

Pause during the story to invite children to think.

Storytimes should be participatory, rather than passive. Here are some ways to involve children throughout the story.

- **What do you notice?** Invite children to point to or describe the illustrations.
- **What would *you* do?** Encourage children to consider how they might respond to problems in a story.
- **What might happen next?** Invite children to make predictions and ask, “Why do you think that?”
- **Why do you think she did that?** Think together to consider perspectives and make inferences about characters' actions and feelings.
- **I see what they did there!** Point out interesting techniques used by the author or illustrator. Savor funny and clever wording or pictures.
- **What does this remind you of?** Make connections to other stories and to children's real-life experiences.
- **Let's recap!** After the last page is read, discuss the story's who, what, and why. Children can explain what happened and share their opinions about how it worked out.

Read, Read, Read Again

Great read-aloud books aren't “one and done!” Read the same engaging book several times over days or weeks to strengthen recall, solidify new vocabulary, and stretch comprehension skills. Each time children experience the book again, they'll understand it a little bit better.



Use props to enhance some stories.

You might collect a basket of toy zoo animals for toddlers to handle as you share *Goodnight Gorilla*. Or, you might bring out owl masks or finger puppets to enact the *Owl Babies* story with preschoolers. You could bring *Blueberries for Sal* to life by dropping blue beads - “ku-plink, ku-plank, ku-plunk” - into a small metal bucket as you read the story with kindergarteners.

Flannel and magnet boards are story props, too. After participating with you, children may later use them to retell the story in their own way. Not every story needs a prop, but using them regularly can help make storytime more interactive and memorable.

Connect stories to real-life experiences and play.

You could read *The Biggest Apple Ever* on a day when children will handle and taste real apples, or laugh together at Anna Rissi’s *The Teacher’s Pet* while investigating tadpoles. Factual books aren’t the only books that support firsthand experiences. Children use their emerging expertise to make sense of fact and fantasy in fictional stories!

Stories can also fuel creative thinking. Puppets, dress-up clothing, and other play objects invite children to retell stories and incorporate their themes into dramatic play. When you observe and listen carefully to children’s play, you’ll notice how their imaginations are inspired by the stories you share.



Resources for Educators

Video

The Mechanics of Reading Aloud video

Dr. Brian Sturm from the School of Information and Library Science at UNC-Chapel Hill, discusses some of the fundamentals of reading picture books to young children.



Websites

Reading Rockets

<https://www.readingrockets.org/>

This site offers tips and videos on reading aloud and storytelling. Look for high-value resources to share with families.

Storyline Online

<https://storylineonline.net/>

This site features picture books read aloud by celebrities. As you enjoy these stories, notice how each reader uses tone, facial expressions, and inflection to bring the story to life!

For the Educator's Bookshelf

Jim Trelease's Read-Aloud Handbook: Eighth Edition

Penguin Books, 2019

An updated and revised version of a classic. It's perfect for parents, educators, and others who want to consider the unique importance of reading aloud to children from infancy to the teenage years.

The Ramped Up Read-Aloud: 101 Picture Book Conversations

Maria P. Walther, Corwin, 2018

Designed with primary grades in mind but adaptable for younger audiences, this book highlights talkable, teachable moments within stories. A sequel, *More Ramped Up Read-Alouds*, is also available.

Reading Picture Books with Children

Megan Dowd Lambert, Imagine Books, 2020

Learn about the "Whole Book Approach" that builds a broad range of literary awareness skills for preschoolers and schoolagers. You might never look at picture books the same way again!

Now Try This

Let's Extend a Story

This hands-on investigation helps children deepen their understanding of events in the classic story, *The Three Little Pigs*. You'll need some twigs, some straw (purchase at farm or pet supply stores), and at least two real bricks. You'll also need a hairdryer.

Begin by telling or reading the story. Afterward, encourage a small group of children to retell the story in their own words.

- Do they recall the sequence of events?
- What happened to the straw house and stick house? Why?
- What happened to the brick house? Why?

Explain to children that they'll have an opportunity to experiment with building materials today. Introduce the hairdryer. What do children know about this tool?

Explain that, today, you'll use the hairdryer to represent the wolf's strong breath as he huffs and puffs. Run the hair dryer on the coolest setting to let children feel the air on their hands and faces.

Next, introduce the straw. Children will want to look closely at the straw, feel it, talk about it, and smell it! After investigating the straw, work together to design a simple straw structure. When children are ready, test your structure with the hairdryer. Build playful anticipation by chanting the wolf's lines together - "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down!" - before you turn on the hairdryer. What happens?

Do children remember what kind of house the second pig built? Investigate and construct with sticks. Ask children to predict what will happen when you use the hairdryer this time. Chant together and give it a try! What happens?

What do children remember about the third pig's house? With close supervision, investigate real bricks. What do children notice? Stack the bricks, make predictions, chant, and try the hairdryer again. What happens?

Conclude the experience by discussing what children noticed with the straw, sticks, and bricks. Encourage sequencing again as you talk about what happened first, next, and last.

This activity is adapted from the free *Explorers Preschool Curriculum*. You can find out more about the curriculum under the resources tab at <https://www.astate.edu/a/childhood-services/>

Now Try This

Let's Tell a Trickster Tale

On the following page, you'll find a story based on an old folktale from Ireland. Children of all ages will enjoy the story, but the discussion questions best suit preschoolers and schoolagers.

Choose a comfortable place to gather together. Explain to children that you have a story to share with them. There's a photo of a wren on the story page, but no other illustrations. That means that children must listen carefully and make a picture in their minds as you tell the story.

Read or tell *The Story of Little Wren*. When you reach the end of the story, talk with the children. Invite them to recall the events of the story.

- What problem were the birds trying to solve?
- How did Little Wren win?
- What do children think of Little Wren's trick?
- Should Little Wren become the leader of the birds? Why or why not?

Some children may feel that Eagle should be declared the winner since he did all the work. Others may think that Little Wren was clever and deserves to win.

Write down what children have to say and help them listen to one another. It's OK to disagree.

Invite children to make illustrations for the story. They may wish to draw pictures of the events they heard about or imagine what might happen next.

After each child has finished drawing, invite them to tell you about their work. Ask if there are any words they would like for you to write on their paper, or if they would like to write words of their own.

This activity is adapted from the free *Explorers Preschool Curriculum*. You can find out more about the curriculum under the resources tab at <https://www.astate.edu/a/childhood-services/>

The Story of Little Wren

Long, long ago, the birds of the forest decided that they needed a leader.

"I should be the leader, because I'm the most colorful bird of all," chirped bright blue Bunting. "Goodness, no," chipped Canary. "I should be leader! I have the most beautiful voice of all!" "Goodness, no," snapped the Heron. "Clearly, I should be leader. After all, I am the tallest bird of all."

The birds argued and squawked until, at long last, it was decided that their leader should be the bird who could fly the highest of all. They planned to have a high-flying contest to pick their leader once and for all.

On the morning of the contest, the best flyers in all the forest gathered at the starting line. There was wide-winged Falcon, and brash Jay, proud Woodpecker, and, of course, big, bold Eagle. Just before the race began, Little Wren hopped up to take a place at the starting line.

All of the birds began to twitter and hoot with laughter. Wren? Little Wren?! They all felt certain that Little Wren was too tiny and too plain. "Silly Wren," they teased, "You'll never win!" Little Wren replied, "Just let me try."

"Ready...set...go!"

There was a furious flapping of wings as the racers took flight. At the very last second, just as the race began, Little Wren flitted onto Eagle's back and held on tight. In all the commotion, nobody noticed – not even Eagle.

The birds flew higher and higher. They soared above the trees and into the clouds. One by one, they grew so tired, so exhausted, that they turned around and coasted back down to the ground. At last, only Eagle was left in the sky, with Little Wren still clinging to his back.

Eagle was tired now. His wings ached. He paused in the air. Just then, Little Wren flew from his back and flitted higher into the sky. "Eagle!" Wren called, "It's just the two of us now. Come, come – let's fly to the sun!"

Eagle screeched with frustration. He tried to catch up with Wren, but Eagle was just... too... tired. With a heavy sigh, he turned and coasted down, down, to the ground.

Wren turned and followed. When Little Wren landed gently on the ground, the other birds crowded around. They couldn't believe their eyes! Could it be true that tiny, plain Little Wren flew highest of all?



Fall in Love with Reading



Amazing Art at Our Fingertips

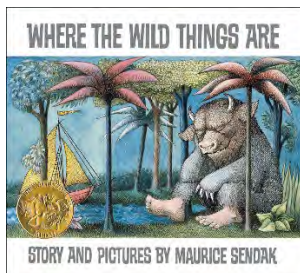
Have you ever thought of your children’s library as an art museum?

It’s true! Picture books offer a wealth of “holdable art” just waiting to be discovered! Turning the pages of a picture book provides an unhurried, intimate opportunity to notice elements like colors, textures, and lines. With our support, children discover the visual side of storytelling.

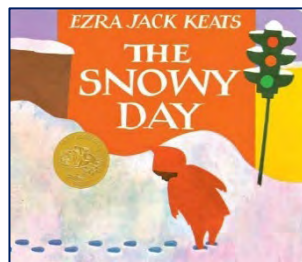
Here’s yet another way to assess your children’s book collection! Notice the books that you’ve made accessible to children—the books they can easily reach and use on their own. As you look at the covers, can you spot a range of artistic materials, techniques, and styles?

Artistic media possibilities include, but are not limited to,

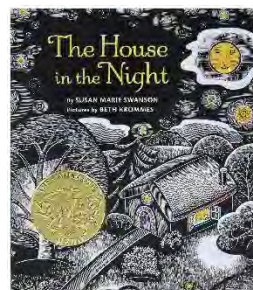
- Colored pencil drawings
- Mixed media or paper collage
- Photography
- Soft watercolor or vivid acrylic paintings
- Digital artwork



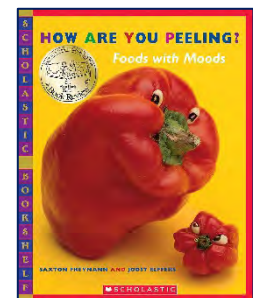
Where the Wild Things Are
Maurice Sendak
Watercolor



The Snowy Day
Ezra Jack Keats
Collage



The House in the Night
Beth Krommes
Scratchboard

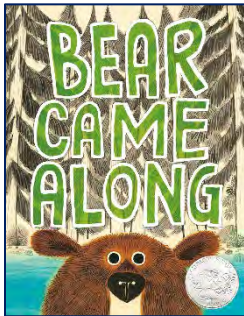
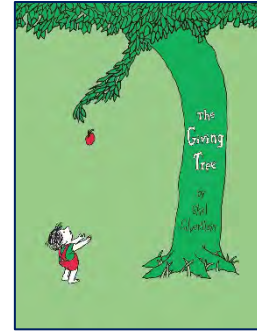


How Are You Peeling?
Saxton Freymann
Photography

Exposure to many different media possibilities supports children’s ongoing and future creative pursuits. As you look at books together, notice artistic details like smudged charcoal or brushstrokes in thick paint. Ask questions like, “Why do you think the illustrator chose these colors?” or, “How can you tell these scenes were cut from paper?”

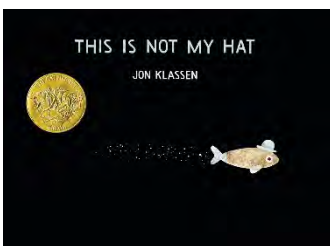
In addition to noticing paints, pencils, and other media, pay attention to the style of the books on your shelf. Here are just a few of the styles you might spot.

Simple sketch and line drawing illustrations can convey lots of information with minimal lines. They typically feature a limited color palette, too. A little can go a long way: skillful sketched illustrations can generate empathy, humor, or irony to support a story.



Cartoon-style illustrations are inspired by classic cartoons and comics. They feature simple shapes, bold lines, and bright colors. Textures are often stylized or omitted, creating a clean, graphic look. Characters are frequently depicted with exaggerated features, such as oversized heads or big eyes. Cartoon-style picture books may feel bold and playful.

Realistic illustrations depict the world in a lifelike way. In these books, you won't find wild colors, odd proportions, or anthropomorphism (human features on animals or objects). Instead, you'll find careful attention to shading, texture, and perspective. Realistic picture books often feel authentic, believable, and nuanced.



Contemporary illustrators experiment with unexpected styles. They try new ideas about color, light, materials, and processes. Their picture books often have a minimalistic look that may be described as fresh and different.

Do you have a favorite artwork style or a favorite children's book illustrator? While it's a pleasure to collect your favorites, consider the value of offering books with varied artistic approaches and techniques. Even very young children have artistic preferences of their own. By making many different illustration styles accessible, you ensure that everyone can discover books that they find beautiful and/or fascinating.

Reading the Pictures: Building Meaning with Illustrations

We've often heard the saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover," but young children can (and must) do precisely that. Notice how a child leans in to carefully choose a book from the shelf. The cover art and illustrations provide many valuable clues about the story.

Setting and characters

"Ohhhh, we got a new dino book. I love, love, LOVE dino books!" (overheard in a three-year-old classroom)

Like older readers, young children are looking for books about things they're interested in. It's not uncommon for a book to become so popular that children race to pick it first. And *that* can inspire their teacher to seek out more books about dinosaurs, trains, or ladybugs - or even purchase duplicate copies of the same story!

Mood

Bright and playful? Or dusky and somber? In well-illustrated picture books, drawings convey the tone of the story. Watch for the child to comment about the mood of the illustrations. She may even respond with her facial expressions and the pitch of her voice. Learning to recognize the tone and mood of a story is a first step toward later reading comprehension skills.



Motives, actions, and reactions

Picture book illustrations can provide supporting details about what is happening and how characters feel about it. A young child looking at a picture book independently often creates a story based on pictures alone. Watch for her to describe places, characters, and events in positive terms (good, nice, kind) or negative terms (bad, mean, dangerous) based on her interpretation of illustrations. She may even make inferences like, "This little boy is lonely," or "The mama bear is so happy that her cub came home!" This is yet another step toward reading comprehension; as she grows into an eager reader, she'll be able to glean clues like this from the words in a book.

The Caldecott Medal is awarded annually to one U.S. picture book artist. The Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, gives the award to their committee's pick for the best-illustrated picture book of the year. Five honor books are also recognized. When you see a gold or silver Caldecott seal on a book's cover, you can be sure it will have spectacular illustrations!



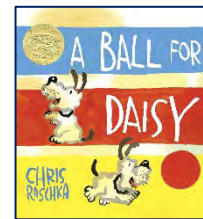
Wonderful, wordless picture books

Unlike books adults read aloud to children, wordless picture books have a story told entirely through pictures. They're the perfect books to invite children to "read" aloud to you! Here are a dozen of our favorite wordless (or nearly wordless) picture books. You'll find books for younger children at the top of this list, with more complex books near the bottom.

A Ball for Daisy

Chris Raschka, Random House Studio, 2015

Poor Daisy! Something has happened to her favorite toy. Infants, toddlers, and younger preschoolers will relate to this sweet story.



Flashlight

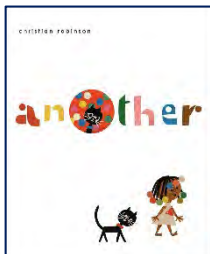
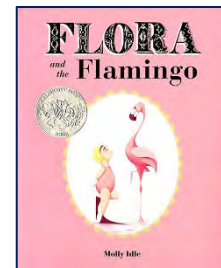
Lizi Boyd, Chronicle Books, 2014

Brilliant light-on-dark illustrations invite toddler and preschool readers along on a nighttime hike.

Flora and the Flamingo

Molly Idle, Chronicle Books, 2013

This charming lift-the-flap book will have your preschoolers trying out all their very best flamingo poses! If your group is hooked, they can find Flora with more feathered friends in follow-up books.



Another

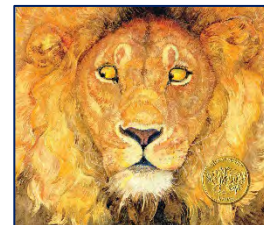
Christian Robinson, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2019

A little girl and her cat have a marvelous adventure. Toddlers and preschoolers will enjoy the bright illustrations, and the storyline is clever enough to captivate schoolagers, too.

The Lion and the Mouse

Jerry Pinkney, Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2009

The classic fable is told in beautiful, full-page drawings that appeal to all ages.



Bunny & Tree

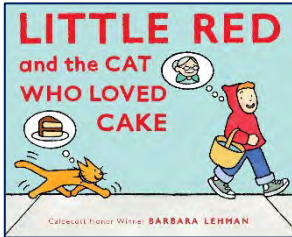
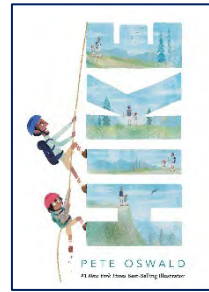
Balint Zsako, Enchanted Lion, 2023

This award-winning book has been described as "enchantingly unconventional!" For starters, it's 180 pages long and includes nine wordless acts, plus a prologue and epilogue. It's fascinating for imaginative readers of all ages.

Hike

Pete Oswald, Candlewick, 2020

Tag along on a hike with a father and child. It's a gentle, unhurried book that invites preschoolers and schoolagers to recall their own favorite outdoor explorations.



Little Red and the Cat Who Loved Cake

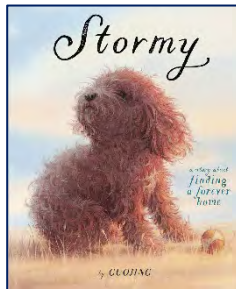
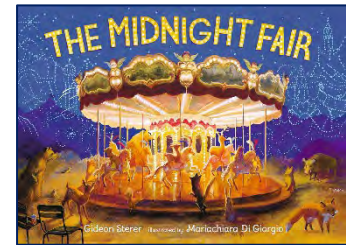
Barbara Lehman, Clarion Books, 2021

This comic strip-style retelling of a familiar fairytale uses picture—rather than word--bubbles. It's lots of fun for older preschoolers and younger schoolagers.

The Midnight Fair

Gideon Sterer and Mariachiara Di Giorgio, Candlewick, 2021

When the fairground is closed for the night, the forest animals come out to play! This one is full of fabulous details for older preschoolers and schoolagers and is especially perfect for sharing during county fair season!



Stormy: A Story About Finding a Forever Home

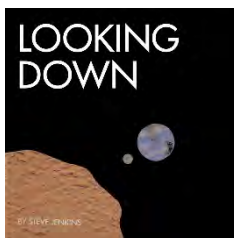
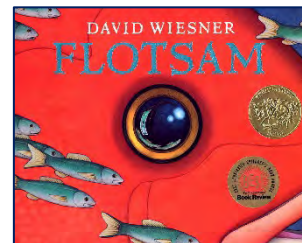
Guojing, Random House Studio, 2019

This sentimental story of a frightened little dog in need of help is ideal for older preschoolers, schoolagers, and rescue dog lovers of all ages.

Flotsam

David Wiesner, Clarion Books, 2006

When an old camera washes up on the beach, a boy discovers the most incredible photos! While younger children will appreciate the artwork, schoolagers will adore this story!



Looking Down

Steve Jenkins, Clarion Books, 2003

Cut-paper illustrations gradually zoom in from outer space to the ground level. It's a thoughtful, low-tech partner for schoolagers' work with Google Earth and other satellite imagery.

Now Try This

Let's Enjoy an Illustrator Study!

An illustrator study focuses on several books by the same illustrator. It's an opportunity for children to learn more about the illustrator's role while exploring their artistic style.

To begin, think about an illustrator your group has enjoyed in the past or that you predict they would especially appreciate. You can search an online database at Goodreads.com or your regional library system to identify more books by the same illustrator.

Once you've made a list, visit your local library or favorite bookseller to gather some books. Here are a few of the many illustrators you might consider.

For infants, toddlers, and young preschoolers

Felicia Bond

Donald Crews

Sandra Boynton

Jill MacDonald

Eric Carle

Brita Teckentrup

For older preschoolers, kindergarteners, and younger schoolagers

Jan Brett

Rafael López

Lois Ehlert

Christian Robinson

Leo Lionni

Mo Willems

For older schoolagers

Quentin Blake

Robert Sabuda

Floyd Cooper

Dan Santat

Steve Jenkins

Chris Van Allsburg

As you explore your collection, discuss what you notice about lines, colors, and other artistic choices. How can you tell that the same person illustrated all of these books? Here are two more ideas to try.

- Create your own artwork inspired by this artist. For example, toddlers could create bright paper collages like Eric Carle, or schoolagers might try crisp pop-up designs inspired by Robert Sabuda.
- Collect other books about the same subject as one of your favorites. (For example, several gingerbread character stories to go with Jan Brett's *Gingerbaby*.) Compare and contrast the choices made by the illustrators.

Fall in Love with Reading

Learning About Ourselves and Our World

4-year-old Charlie turns the pages of a library book about going to school. His eyes widen with excitement when he discovers a vibrant, full-page illustration of children at recess. “They have a playground just like mine!”

Charlie’s finger traces the contours of the slide, the swings, and the basketball hoop. His brow furrows in concentration as he examines every inch of the illustration. He wonders aloud, “But - where’s their sandbox?!”



Charlie is engaging his critical thinking skills as he spots similarities between his own school playground and the one in his library book. He’s beginning to make some connections about how schools can be alike and different.

Books invite curious children to reflect on their own familiar experiences before, eventually, broadening their perspectives about other people, places, and times. Stories can provide a springboard for rich questions and vibrant adult-child conversations. Through this process, children deepen their knowledge about the world we share. The following pages will consider how books support self-awareness and social studies learning at every age.

Sharing Books with Infants and Toddlers

Face Time

Have you ever noticed that infants are captivated by faces? This fascination is more than just cute; it’s a critical component of brain development. Research shows that young infants prefer looking at faces over objects, and this preference continues to grow over the first year. Books featuring large, high-contrast photos of baby faces are particularly effective at capturing an infant’s attention, sparking engagement and interaction. These books invite adults to point to and label facial features and expressions, such as smiles.



You can find many books featuring photos of baby faces. *My Face Book* from Star Bright Books is one strong example. It’s large photos on simple backgrounds depict concepts such as happy, sleepy, and crying. Bi-lingual versions are available in 24 different languages!

Been There, Done That

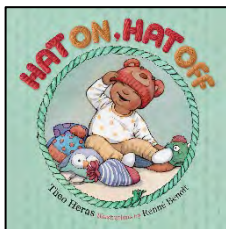
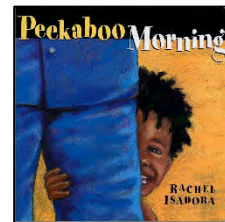
Books about familiar experiences and places help infants and toddlers build visual processing skills. They're learning to connect photos and drawings in books with real life. Here are some possibilities.

- Books about recognizable routines, such as eating, taking a bath, or going to bed.
- Books about familiar objects, such as toys, clothing, and vehicles.
- Books about places the child experiences often, such as the park and the supermarket.
- Books about the current season that align with real-life experiences where you live.

Here are some books that are likely to remind little ones of their own experiences.

Peekaboo Morning

Rachel Isadora, G.P. Putman Books for Young Readers, 2008
Play peekaboo! And, try singing your group's favorite good morning song to the toddler in the book!



Hat On, Hat Off

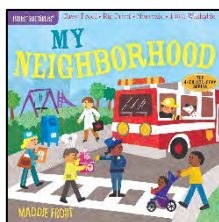
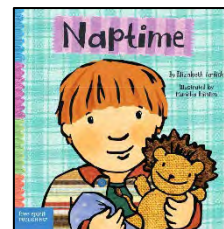
Theo Harris and Renné Benoit, 2022

Consider pairing this book with actual hats to try on in front of a shatterproof mirror.

Naptime

Elizabeth Verdick and Marieka Heinlen,
Free Spirit Publishing, 2008

Compare and contrast your child's experience with the book.
“We turn off our lights at naptime, too.”



My Neighborhood

Maddie Frost and Amy Pixton, Indestructibles, 2018

Each page has many details! Take your time as you look for favorite vehicles and familiar activities.

Sharing Books with Two-Year-Olds, Preschoolers, and Kindergarteners

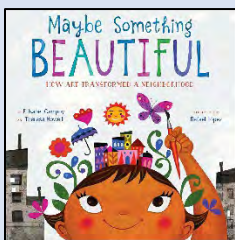


As toddlers grow into preschoolers, their world expands. They are more aware and better able to remember things now and actively work to make sense of each new event. Books about families and daily routines continue to be popular, along with the books described below.

Our People and Places

Children are learning about activities and interactions in their neighborhood and around town. Look for books that connect to children’s current interests and experiences. Here are some possibilities.

- Books about occupations and places where people work. Post offices, fire stations, hospitals, construction sites, and farms are always popular with preschoolers! And, children’s budding awareness of economics is bolstered by books about shops, markets, and restaurants.
- Books that spotlight ballparks, bridges, train tracks, landmarks, or other important features that might remind children of those in their town. “Who built that?” - Children may begin to show interest in the history of places they know well.
- Books about community life. Books about people supporting their communities by cleaning up, planting gardens, helping others, or caring for animals may inspire preschoolers and kindergarteners to think of ways they can be helpers, too!



Maybe Something Beautiful, by F. Isabel Campoy, tells the true story of a community mural project. What murals and sculptures can children find in your town?

“Children need windows and mirrors.

They need mirrors in which they see themselves and windows through which they see the world.”

-Dr Rudine Sims Bishop

Memorable Moments

Whether it's their first airplane ride, first loose tooth, or the first day of kindergarten, children are eager to read all about it! Stories about other children having similar experiences strengthen event-related vocabulary and knowledge while building perspective about other points of view. Here are a few of our favorite books about milestones and once-in-a-while events.

Bike On, Bear!

Cynthia Liu and Kristyna Litten, Aladdin, 2015

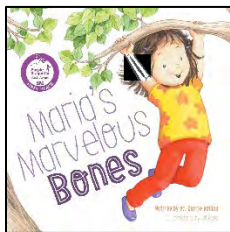
Bear struggles—and struggles!—to learn to ride a bike in this book about perseverance and friendship.



Lola Reads to Leo

Anna McQuinn and Rosalind Beardshaw, Charlesbridge, 2012

Lola's parents help her prepare to be a new big sister. This gentle story supports this challenging change in a positive, relatable way.



Maria's Marvelous Bones

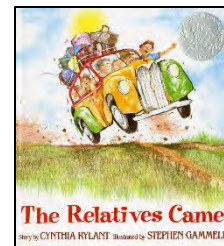
Dr. Carrie Kollias, Tellwell Talent, 2018

A fascinating look at fractures, x-rays, casts, and healing. Pick this one when a child, classmate, or sibling is injured.

The Relatives Came

Cynthia Rylant and Stephen Gammell, Aladdin, 1993

This classic story vividly depicts a vibrant summer get-together with family!



That's Not My Name!

Anoosha Syed, Viking Books, 2022

On Mirha's first day of school, she's surprised nobody knows how to say her name. It's frustrating at first, but with support from her family, Mirha persists.



When the Storm Comes

Linda Ashman and Taeun Yoon, Nancy Paulsen Books, 2020

This lyrical book explains how people and animals prepare for, ride out, and recover after a big storm. Although the story is set in a coastal town, much of it is relevant for Arkansas children!

Children in Other Times and Places

Preschoolers and kindergarteners are just beginning to grasp concepts like “a long time ago” and “far away.” Their budding interests in geography and history are bolstered by relatable stories in places different from their own “here and now.”

- Tales from Indigenous peoples and others who traditionally lived where you are. If possible, consider inviting guest storytellers to visit with children.
- Stories set long ago invite children to notice bygone clothing, vehicles, or other technology. What do children notice and wonder?
- Stories set in other parts of the country or world. How are the experiences in the story like your children’s? If they’re interested, look together at a map or globe, or gather other books to help you find out more.



Sharing Books with Schoolagers

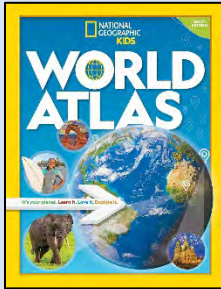
Throughout the elementary school years and beyond, young people continue to deepen their understanding of themselves, their communities, their country, and their wider world. They have more concrete knowledge about how people lived differently in the past and are developing a sense of chronology. Through relatable characters and engaging narratives, books offer a unique window into a wide range of perspectives.

Adults in the out-of-school-time setting can be enthusiastic listeners when young people want to talk about what they’re reading. Questions like, “*Who is your favorite character in the story so far?*” or, “*Has anything about this book surprised you?*” won’t feel like a quiz. Instead, these questions show genuine interest and encourage readers to share their thoughts. As literacy expert Pam Allyn explains, “We...lean in to the joy of their percolating ideas.”

In addition to connecting with individual readers, educators working with multi-age schoolage groups may consider using stories and resource books to support project-based learning. Here are a few possibilities.

Pen Pals

Create cards to send to friends and family around the country or even around the world. Place page flags in an atlas to show where you've sent mail. Who will write back?

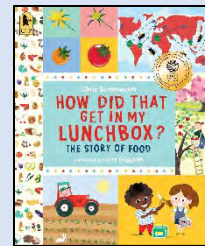


Think atlases are too old-fashioned for today's kids? The *National Geographic Kids World Atlas, 6th edition*, will make you think again! It pairs traditional maps with stunning photography and fascinating statistics. It's recommended for ages nine and up.

Origin Stories

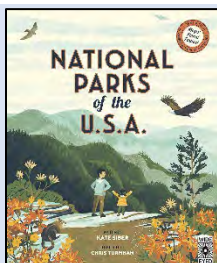
Read and research to find out exactly how (and where) something is made. Possibilities could include anything from pencils or crayons to ice cream or sunscreen!

How Did That Get in My Lunchbox, by Chris Butterworth and Lucia Gaggiotti, takes you from farm to factory to find out where sandwich bread, apple juice, and other lunch box staples come from. It's ideal for curious K-2 readers.



Virtual Road Trip

Take a vote to decide on a few favorite National Parks. Kids can sign up for committees that “visit” one of the parks through books and other media. Afterward, they can report back about wildlife, habitats, recreation opportunities, and favorite features.



There are lots of recently-published National Park books aimed at young readers, and this is one of the best! Written by Kate Siber and illustrated by Chris Turnham, *National Parks of the U.S.A.* is filled with maps, fun facts, and retro illustrations to captivate 1st - 3rd graders.

Fall in Love with Reading

Connecting with Concepts

Concept books focus on something children are learning, such as the alphabet, colors, numbers, or days of the week. They can be an appealing way to stretch and strengthen specific skills. The very best concept books do two things.

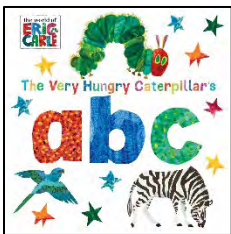
1. They catch and keep the child's attention. They're visually interesting, playful, and entertaining.
2. They are well-matched to what learners know and can do so far. On their own or with adult support, the child can make sense of the concept at the heart of the book.

We can preview concept books with children's interests and abilities in mind. We can also observe children as they use books for cues about what they like and understand. There are thousands of concept books on the market, but our book storage space and budget are limited; let's find the ones that truly excite and engage our children!



We'll explore five specific kinds of concept books in the following pages. The final list offers several more categories to consider. In each list, simple books for younger children will be at the top, with more complex books at the bottom. At the end of this section, you'll find tips for sharing concept books with children and an idea to try.

Alphabet Books



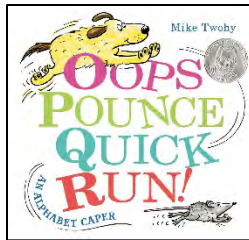
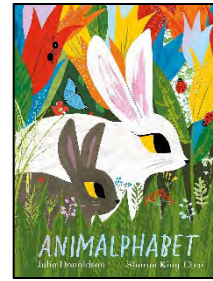
The Very Hungry Caterpillar's ABC

Eric Carle, World of Eric Carle, 2016

This sturdy board book earns high praise for showing the often-ignored lowercase letters and demonstrating how they fit into each word. It's an excellent pick for young groups with a wide range of ages and/or abilities.

Animalphabet

Julia Donaldson and Sharon King-Chai, Two Hoots, 2020
This peek-through guessing book features an animal for each letter of the alphabet.



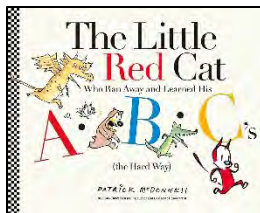
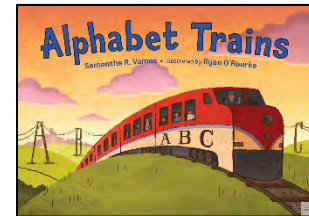
Oops, Pounce, Quick, Run!

Mike Twohy, Balzer + Bray, 2016

Follow Dog and Mouse on a playful alphabet romp that goes beyond the usual labeling of familiar objects!

Alphabet Trains

Samantha R. Vamos and Ryan O'Rourke, Charlesbridge, 2019
Have you ever met a train-obsessed preschooler? While many of our top picks feature animals, this one reminds us that we can find alphabet books related to almost anything our children are interested in!



The Little Red Cat Who Ran Away and Learned His ABC's

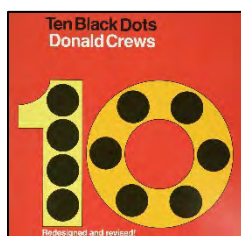
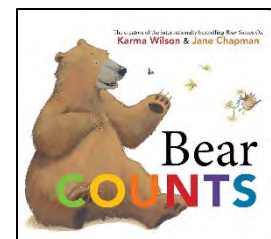
Patrick McDonnell, Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2017

This wordless alphabet has a humorous storyline perfect for sharing one-on-one with preschoolers, while schoolagers will enjoy exploring it independently. The key at the back may send everyone back to read it again!

Number and Counting Books

Bear Counts

Karma Wilson and Jane Chapman, Little Simon Books, 2017
This sweet, summery book offers numerous opportunities to count groups up to five. It's perfect for younger and less experienced learners. If your group is in love with *Bear*, you can also find books about colors and opposites.



Ten Black Dots

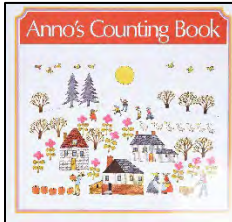
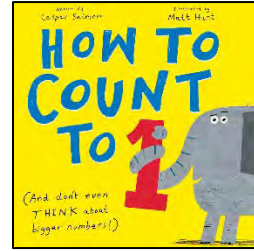
Donald Crews, Greenwillow Books, 1995

What can you do with a dot? Numerals and number words are highlighted as simple black dots are repurposed in creative ways.

How to Count to ONE

Caspar Salmon and Matt Hunt, Nosy Crow, 2023

Preschool fans of *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* and *Do Not Open This Book* will gleefully outwit the narrator to count way higher than one in this energetic read-aloud.



Anno's Counting Book

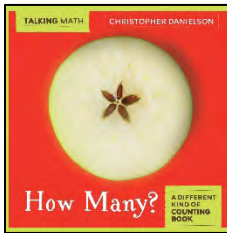
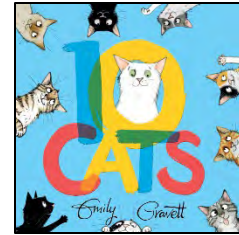
Mitumasa Anno, Crowell, 1977

This simple, beautiful counting book invites exploration of numbers 0-12. On each page, numbers are represented by numerals, cubes, and objects.

10 Cats

Emily Gravett, Boxer Books, 2023

This adorable book invites readers to find subsets within a group of ten. A seek-and-find element makes it ideal for sharing individually and with small groups.



How Many? A Different Kind of Counting Book

Christopher Danielson, Charlesbridge, 2019

This book of engaging photos highlights many different possibilities for counting. It's a great conversation starter, too!

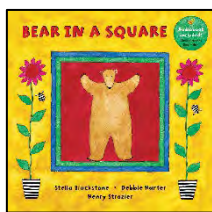
100 Bugs: A Counting Book

Kate Narita and Suzanne Kaufmann, Giroux Books, 2018

While plenty of books count to 10 or 20, this one takes readers to 100 in a highly approachable way.



Books About Shapes



Bear in a Square

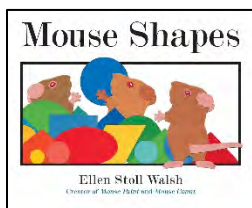
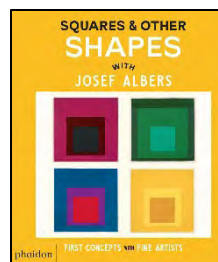
Stella Blackstone and Henry Strozier, Barefoot Books, 2020

With many colorful shapes to spot in each simple spread, infants and toddlers will enjoy sharing this board book with you long before they can name shapes independently. There's a paperback version for preschool readers, too.

Squares and Other Shapes: with Josef Albers

Josef Albers and Meagan Bennett, Phaidon Press, 2025

Explore shapes of all colors and sizes in this book from the First Concepts with Fine Art series. It's a board book, but the artwork is fabulous for all ages.



Mouse Shapes

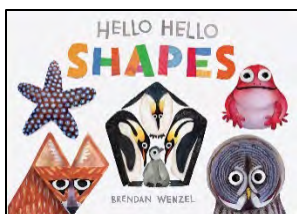
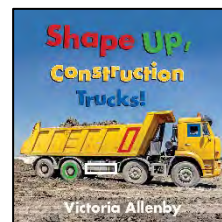
Ellen Stoll Walsh, Clarion Books 2017

This playful story introduces the idea of combining simple shapes. Look for *Mouse Paint* and *Mouse Count*, too.

Shape Up, Construction Trucks

Victoria Allenby, Pajama Press, 2020

Chant along or sing to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* as you spot shapes on large, clear photos of construction equipment.



Hello Hello Shapes

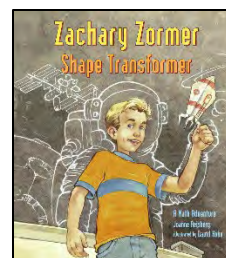
Brendan Wenzel, Chronicle Books, 2024

From tree frogs in a triangle to a pentagon of penguins, this book pairs animals and shapes in unexpected ways.

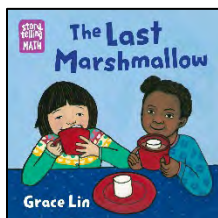
Zachary Zormer: Shape Transformer

Joanne Anderson Reisberg, Charlesbridge, 2006

Schoolagers can explore perimeter and area while trying Zach's clever math tricks. This is one of 17 books in the Charlesbridge Math Adventures series.



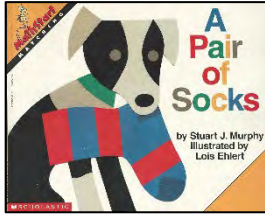
More Concept Books to Support Mathematics



The Last Marshmallow

Grace Lin, Charlesbridge, 2020

This first look at fair-share division comes from the excellent Storytelling Math board book collection.



A Pair of Socks

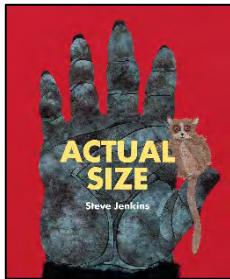
Stuart J. Murphy and Lois Ehlert, HarperCollins, 1996

This colorful look at sets and sorting is ideal for children ages 2-4.

Circle Under Berry

Carter Higgins, Chronicle Books, 2021

This artsy book explores shapes, patterns, spatial relationships, and more. It challenges children who've mastered the basics to consider multiple attributes.

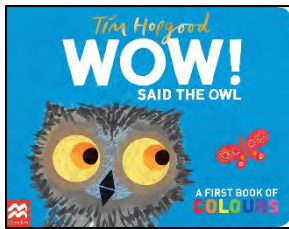


Actual Size

Steve Jenkins, Clarion Books, 2011

A perpetual favorite with older preschoolers and schoolagers, this book shows huge and tiny creatures at their actual size! It's an excellent conversation starter about measurement and comparison.

Books About Colors



Wow! Said the Owl

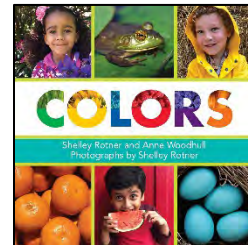
Tim Hopgood, MacMillan Children's Books, 2010

A little owl who stays up past bedtime is amazed by the colorful daytime world. Toddlers will love saying "Wow!" along with you!

Colors

Shelley Rotner and Anne Woodhull, Holiday House, 2023

These vivid, high-quality photos highlight colors in the world around us; the book will especially appeal to ages 2-5



These Colors are Bananas

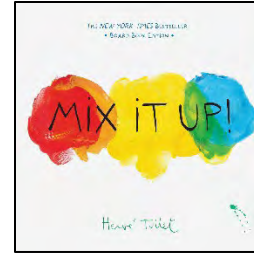
Jason Fulford and Tamara Shopsin, Phaidon Press, 2018

Let's challenge the notion that everyday objects are always - and only - a particular color! This sturdy board book invites us to look more closely. A great conversation starter for all ages!

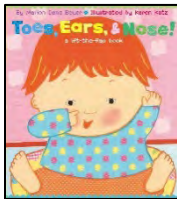
Mix It Up

Hervé Tullet, Chronicle Books, 2014

Children are invited to pat and rub, then turn the page to see the colors appear to mix and change. Also available in board book format, it's ideal for sharing one-on-one.



Even More Concept Books to Consider



Toes, Ears, and Nose

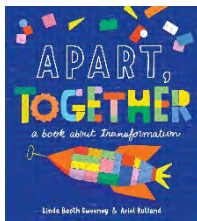
Marion Dane Bauer and Karen Katz, Little Simon, 2003

This cheerful board book invites infants and toddlers to explore body parts and clothing.

Big Bear, Little Chair

Lizi Boyd, Chronicle Books, 2015

This clever book about opposites starts predictably but has a few surprises in store.



Apart, Together

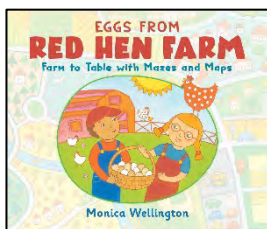
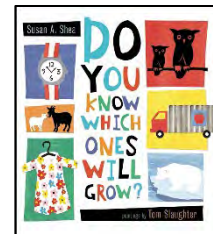
Linda Booth Sweeney and Ariel Rutland, Balzer + Bray. 2023

This book focuses on transformation. What comes together to make soap bubbles, cake batter, and more? Ideal for ages 2-5.

Do You Know Which Ones Will Grow?

Susan A. Shea, Scholastic, 2011

A duckling grows to become a duck. Does a car grow to become a... truck? This rhyming science concept book invites children to consider living and nonliving things.



Eggs from Red Hen Farm

Monica Wellington, Holiday House, 2022

Readers ages 3 - 7 can learn the basics of cartography as they follow the map to help the farmer complete her deliveries.

Tips for Sharing Concept Books with Children

- Plan firsthand experiences to deepen concept learning. For example, you might go on a shape hunt after reading a shape book, or mix paint after reading a book about colors. Books can help introduce or reinforce concepts, but the most effective learning is hands-on.
- Model concept-related strategies. For example, you might demonstrate how to form letter sounds while reading an alphabet book or touch each item as you count your way through a math concept book.
- Share books in interactive ways. You aren't just reading to children; you're reading **with** them! Invite children to name objects, point to pictures, and so on. Many concept books have riddles to solve!

Now Try This

Let's Make a Concept Book

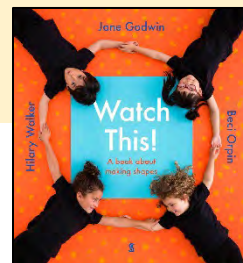
Now that you've enjoyed some concept books, you and your group might be ready to create a one-of-a-kind book of your own.

Here are a few possibilities.

- Take close-up photographs of children's hands holding up 0-10 fingers. Mount each photo on a book page and add the numeral and number word.
- Gather play objects or items from nature to place on matching-colored sheets of construction paper. Take photographs for a book about colors.
- Make a book about places and people around your program. Can children help make a map?
- Invite groups of schoolagers to design and create concept books to share with younger groups.

You can make one special book for your reading area and/or a photocopied or digital version to share with each family. See the pages at the end of this ACW book for more ideas about creating books with children.

You might find inspiration in *Watch This: A Book About Making Shapes* by Jane Godwin. Would your group like to make shapes, too?



Fall in Love with Reading

Telling Our Own Stories

So far, this resource has focused on books that adults share with children. We've explored their vast potential to stretch and strengthen skills while fostering a lifelong love of reading. Now, let's consider empowering children to become story characters, authors, and illustrators. By co-creating our own books, we cultivate communication and creative expression while helping children deepen their understanding of books and reading.



If you have a generous budget, you might opt for a professionally printed book of children's photos, stories, and/or artwork. These can be a meaningful culminating project after studying the book-making process or a fabulous end-of-year keepsake for families. One company, [Student Treasures Publishing](#), offers one free book for the group with the option for families to purchase copies for home.

There are also many possibilities for budget-friendly homemade books! Books like these don't have to be saved for special occasions; they can be a regular part of your group's weekly experiences. Here are some examples.

- Simple construction paper covers stapled together
- Clear plastic page protectors in 3-prong binders or folders
- Repurposed photo albums



To make a **clipboard story**, staple pages together and clip them to a clipboard. This sturdy backboard makes the book easier to carry and handle.

Clipboard stories can be hung on hooks for display or stored alongside other books on your shelf. Swapping the pages when new stories are created is quick and easy.

What is there to tell? Lots! On the following pages, we'll consider five different purposes for making books for—and with—children.

Creating books to get to know one another

Represent each child in a book about yourselves. As they make and read their book, children will make connections and learn more about each other.

Family albums

A photo album of families or pets can be meaningful for all ages, including infants. Or, make an album highlighting your “school family.” Each person can share their favorite food, color, animal, and/or other fun facts.

The story of our names

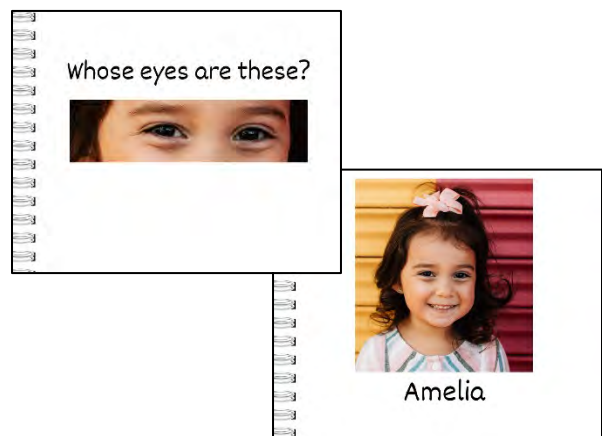
Invite each family to share the story of their child’s name. Share this information under a large, bold print of the child’s name. Add a photo and invite each child to decorate the rest of their page.

A book about our day

Begin your book with a group photo naming your group. “We’re the Cubs class, and this is our day.” Take a photo and create a page for each part of your daily schedule. Invite children to think about what they want to say. For example, you might pair a photo of children on cots with the words, “Next, we have rest time. We cover up with our soft blankets and listen to quiet music.” Consider lending this book to new families who join your group mid-year.

Guessing books about ourselves

Guessing books are perpetually popular with young children! Try cropping a close-up photo of each child’s eyes. Ask, “Whose eyes are these?” On the following page (or under a flap), write the child’s name and add a photo of their whole face. You can make similar books with hands, smiles, and so on. Be sure to include educator photos, too!



Creating books to extend our favorite library books

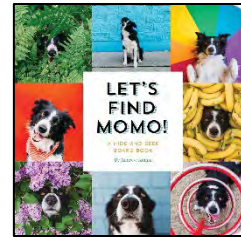
Write your own books in the style of your favorite authors. The simple, playful stories described in the first section of this book may be a great place to start. Here are some examples.

Use the link below or scan the code at right for a printable book template, *Children, Children, Who Do You See?* It's inspired by Eric Carle's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*
<https://bit.ly/ChildrenChildrenACW25>

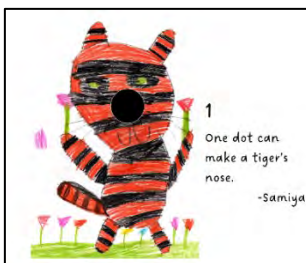


Follow *Pete the Cat's* lead to create a book that shows your children "Rocking in Their School Shoes." This can also be done in the style of a guessing book, showing just shoes first, followed by the whole child.

After reading *Let's Find Momo*, take a photo of your favorite stuffed toy animal "hiding" in various familiar places, indoors and out. Older toddlers can help decide where to place the animal, or preschoolers could create a book to gift to infants and younger toddlers.



After reading *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood, invite each child to create a page of a *Silly Class* book using the same rhyme. "**Silly** (child's name) **went to town**, (a way of moving, such as marching, jumping, or dancing) **backward, upside down!**" Mount photos or self-portraits in your book—upside down, of course!



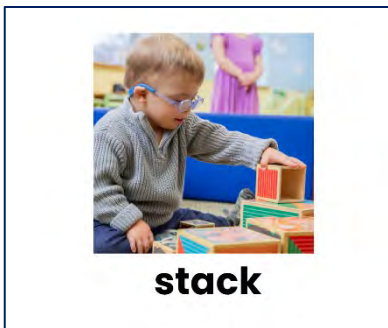
Incorporate black construction paper dots into your own pictures inspired by Donald Crews' *10 Black Dots*. Count dots with each artist and write down their description: "Two wheels on a motorcycle."

Invite schoolagers to design and create books for younger groups. Will they opt for a rhyming story, a wordless picture book, a factual guide to Arkansas insects, or something else? A Book Fair event could be a fun way to share!

Creating books that tell about children’s play

Through play, children stretch their capabilities in numerous ways. They strengthen large and small motor skills as they interact with play objects, and build interpersonal skills as they communicate and collaborate. Play also calls on children to focus, persist, invent, decide, and solve problems—all highly valuable skills for learners!

What might happen if we document children’s play in photos and words? Educator and child-created books can be powerful tools for everyone. Here are a few examples from real-life classrooms.



Play Actions

Because she knows that two-year-olds are honing their ability to use verbs, a toddler teacher paired photos of her children at play with simple action words. For example, a page with the word *scoop* showed a child playing with sand. *Ride* showed a child on a wheeled toy, while *squeeze* showed a child kneading playdough. The teacher reports that this is one of her group’s favorite books to look at independently. Children talk about friends in photos and seem inspired to imitate the play they see.

Learning Center Albums

A preschool teacher often takes photos of her three-year-old group as they play in centers. She uses the **clipboard story** idea shared earlier in this section to create photo albums for various learning centers.

Children often sit with the albums, browsing the stories of play on previous days. They get excited when they see themselves, and their teacher has heard them elaborate on what they remember or suggest, “Let’s do that again!” Pages can also be added to children’s individual portfolios.



Plan, Do, I See You!

A pre-kindergarten teacher invites his four and five-year-olds to make “play plan” drawings before they go to learning centers. Each child draws something specific that they would like to do today. Their teacher writes down their exact words as they describe their plan. “I’m going to make a big, big house with the Legos, and all the people can live inside.”



As plans come to life through play, children can use a tablet computer to photograph their work. These photos offer uniquely valuable snapshots of emerging skills when paired with play journals.

Play planning is part of several early childhood curricula, including HighScope and Tools of the Mind. Their resources offer more information about strategies that invite children to talk, draw, and write about their play.

Daily Play Stories

After reading about the Anji Play model, a preschool teaching team has added a reflection time to the end of their day. Children are invited to recall their play process as playtime photos are projected on their Smartboard. It’s an opportunity for educators and peers to ask questions and learn more about ideas children tried, things they discovered, and problems they solved. One educator takes notes during reflection time while their partner facilitates the discussion. Later, photos and stories will be added to a cumulative class album.



Anji Play, sometimes referred to as True Play, was developed in Anji County, China. It emphasizes child-directed play with open-ended play objects such as mats, tunnels, and planks.

If you’re curious about Anji Play, you can find more information here: <https://www.anjiplay.co/>

Learning Stories

Inspired by educators in New Zealand, a toddler educator began crafting learning stories for children in her group. Here's one example.

“Ben explored our new chalkboard for the first time today. He selected a bright pink chalk and tapped it against the board. It made a small thumping sound and left a tiny mark. Ben stood very still and considered the mark he had made. Then, he tapped his chalk on the board again. And again. He seemed to wonder, ‘If I do it again, will I get the same results?’ That’s how scientists learn about their world!

And then—thump-thump-thump—Ben tapped quickly, making lots and lots of pink dots! Ben laughed out loud and reached for a piece of blue chalk. He seemed delighted in his newfound ability to make marks on the board.”



Unlike traditional documentation, Learning Stories are written for the child. They include photographs and highlight positive, personalized observations that can be shared with children and their families. If you'd like to read more about Learning Stories, you can find sample stories and more information about the process here:

<https://tomdrummond.com/looking-closely-at-children/examples/>



Documenting Children's Play: More Resources for Educators

Honoring the Moment in Young Children's Lives: Observation, Documentation, and Reflection
Ron Grady, Redleaf Press, 2024

Pedagogical Documentation in Early Childhood
Susan Stacy, Redleaf Press, 2022

Creating books that record children’s storytelling

Children have their own stories to tell! Children who’ve had positive experiences with adult storytellers soon mimic the language and actions of storytelling. They use their developing language skills to construct a narrative about something that feels worth telling. Body movements, facial expressions, and gestures help fill in details that may be hard to articulate with words alone. The examples below illustrate how storytelling takes shape in the first years of life.

“Momma, Hank bear.” - told by a toddler

She glances at her teacher and then looks up at her mother, who explains, “Yes, our puppy Hank tore up your toy bear this morning, didn’t he? He’s teething, and he’s chewing everything in the house!” The toddler frowns as she repeats in a serious tone, “Hank. Bear.”

Storytelling begins with reminiscence. Because this toddler doesn’t have the words to do it on her own yet, she’s prompting her mother to help her share a story about something that happened at home.

“Daddy took me on the porch, and it was dark. And then there were fireworks! Fireworks so loud, and I put my hands on top of my ears, like this!”

- told by a three-year-old

Toddlers and rookie storytellers continue to talk about events they’ve experienced. Because this anecdote feels important to the child, she may tell it often to anyone who will listen. Telling her story is one way she can process an experience that felt frightening or exciting.

“I stepped in the mud puddle but I didn’t cry—goodness no! I went walking along and a song and home and I took off the brown mud shoes and put on my other socks. And Grammy said, ‘It was just an accident.’”

-told by a four-year-old

Preschoolers begin to tell stories inspired by familiar books and media. The beginning of this child’s story is clearly connected to *Pete the Cat*. The rest of the story may be a recollection of actual events or the child’s way of imagining what might happen if he steps into a puddle like Pete did.

Details are sparse, but he’s got a general idea of how stories flow. We may be able to infer—or ask follow-up questions—to understand key details: Dry socks felt better, Grammy wasn’t angry, and they managed to clean the muddy shoes. This story may be the child’s way of reassuring himself, “It’s OK. Accidents happen, and we can handle it.” That’s a theme he *might* have picked up from Pete!

“Once upon a time, there was a little bunny, and she had a house by the rainbow. So she got sick from a bad storm, but then the doctor gave her medicine, and then her mommy came, and then the little bunny was so happy because her mommy came. The end.”

-told by a four-year-old

Eventually, children begin telling original stories of their own. Although this bunny story seems simplistic, it has a clear beginning, middle, and end. It also provides hints about the setting and explains a problem and resolution. This young storyteller has already internalized vital elements of storytelling! Repetition continues; this child may retell a similar story for weeks.

Early stories can be dramatic! Young children often include themes of getting lost, getting sick, getting hurt, and so on. There may be “bad guys,” big storms, and dark nights. These themes may be countered when characters get well or get found, get rescued, or become heroes before the story’s end. Stories offer children a safe, controllable way to explore complex, powerful ideas.



“Once, there was a turtle named Shelley. He was red and yellow with brown spots. One day, there was a sign saying there was going to be a big race at the middle of town. The winner would get a medal and one million dollars!

Shelley told all the other animals that he was going to win that big race. But all the other animals laughed at him. They said everybody knows turtles are too slow. They didn’t know that Shelly had a brilliant, secret idea...”

-told by a seven-year-old



As children grow, stories are used to explain and entertain. Gone is the “and then, and then, and then” run-on pattern of preschool storytelling. He’s grouping information logically and using more complex sentence structures. His stories are also longer, with sensical details and fewer fragmented ideas. He may incorporate wordplay, humor, and plot twists while exploring story structures.

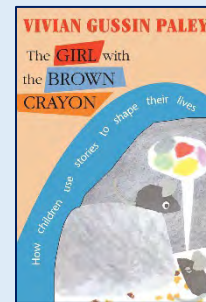
Once we've tuned in to children's stories, we can find ways to document them. Elementary-aged storytellers may need only paper and drawing tools—and encouragement to write and illustrate whenever they please. With younger children, we can ask, “May I write down your story?” Children can draw pictures to accompany their words. Small, rechargeable voice recorders are another option. These allow educators to capture everything children say without disrupting the flow of the story, and recordings can be transcribed later.

Children's stories can be kept in individual or group albums. Notice how children lean in to study drawings and ask to have the words read aloud again and again. In addition to recalling their stories, they may think about the connection between spoken and written language and their emerging roles as storytellers and illustrators.

Educator Resources to Support Young Storytellers

The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter: The Uses of Storytelling in the Classroom
Vivian Gussin Paley, Harvard University Press, 1991

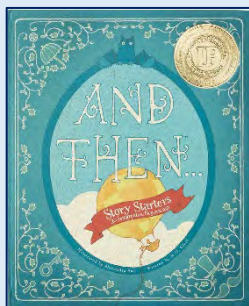
The Girl with the Brown Crayon: How Children Use Stories to Shape Their Lives
Vivian Gussin Paley, Harvard University Press, 1998



Vivian Gussin Paley was an author, educator, and researcher focused on imaginative play and storytelling. She encouraged a three-part “storytelling-story acting” model.

1. A child dictates a story to an adult, who writes down exactly what they say.
2. With the storyteller's permission, the story is read aloud to peers.
3. The storyteller child casts peer volunteers as characters and provides direction as children act out their story.

Over the years, educators have adopted and adapted Paley's model with preschoolers through middle schoolers. Connecting children's storytelling with role play is a powerful way to make children's voices heard.



And Then... Story Starters (Volumes One and Two)
M.H. Clark and Alexandra Ball, Compendium

Each deck includes 20 oversized story starter cards. Each offers a fascinating first paragraph for a story just waiting to be finished! Ideal for young storytellers ages four through ten (and grown-up storytellers, too).

Creating books that document learning experiences

Lastly, we can construct books that support projects, field trips, and other special activities. These help children reflect on their experiences, solidifying their memory and understanding. Here are some possibilities.

Changes, Changes

Take photos to record changes in nature over time. For example, you might photograph seedlings as they sprout, grow, and flower. Or, capture seasonal changes around the same tree throughout the year. Invite children to describe changes as you create a sequential book of photos.



The Story of a Special Day

Whether it's a scheduled firetruck visit, an ice cream social with families, or an Arkansas Children's Week parade, you can create a book of photos and/or drawings to record the memorable event.

A "How-To" Guide of Our Own

Our children gain expertise through their experiences. What do your children know a lot about? Enlist their help in creating an instructional guide about caring for your class pet, mixing colors, baking banana bread, walking to the park, or something else. Focus on step-by-step instructions and information everyone should know. The children's guide can be shared with families or other groups.

Now Try This

Let's Help Children Tell Their Own Stories

Look again at the co-constructed stories suggested in this section.

- A photo album of peers, families, or pets
- The story of your names or your daily schedule
- A guessing book featuring photos of peers
- A book inspired by a favorite library book
- A book of stories about children's play
- An album of children's own, imaginative stories and illustrations
- A book to document a special day or planned learning experience
- A "how-to" guide where children share advice and expertise

Which of these feels like a strong fit for your group? Why?

What supplies will you need?

What role(s) will children play in creating this book?

How and where will you share your finished book with children? With families?

Now Try This

Let's Make a Storytelling Basket

This add-on story activity is best suited for older preschoolers and schoolagers.

Collect a basket of toys and trinkets. Possibilities include dollhouse figures, toy animals, and other familiar props, alongside open-ended objects like felt shapes, wooden spools, coins, and pretty pebbles.

The story begins when one person chooses an object from the basket. They may describe their object in a literal or symbolic way. For example, they might select a piece of blue ribbon and begin, "Once upon a time, there was a girl who wore blue ribbons in her hair." Or, they might select the same blue ribbon and begin, "Once upon a time, there was a deep, blue river."

When they feel ready, they'll pass the story to someone nearby. This person selects another item from the basket to continue the story. Periodically pause to recap the whole story (so far) as you touch each item. When the story ends, invite children to create illustrations with their favorite art materials.

Now Try This

Let's Go from Story to Stage

This section introduced Vivian Gussin Paley's storytelling-story acting model. Invite your group to tell - and then dramatize - their own, imaginative stories.

- Create puppets and set up a simple puppet theater. Don't forget a row of seats for your peer audience.
- Design masks and/or costumes for each character.
- Create a backdrop mural to bring your setting to life.
- Invite schoolagers to create storyboards and use stop-motion techniques to record a story using Lego figures, clay characters, or other representations.

With your group, decide whether you would like to share your production with families. Consider video recording rather than bringing families in for a high-pressure performance. If you'd like to include a family event, invite everyone to a screening of your video. Children will enjoy watching with their peers and special adults. (Popcorn and red carpet optional!)



Now Try This

Let's Assess Our Classroom Library

This year's Arkansas Children's Week resource outlined many ways books support children's learning and development. To assess your book collection, gather all of the books that are easily accessible to children. Sort the books into seven stacks.

1. **Simple books that play with the sounds of language.** These books play with rhythm and rhyme. You've seen examples of pages 3-9 of this book.
2. **Factual, non-fiction books that can help answer children's questions.** You can find examples on pages 11-17.
3. **Complex stories—books with a narrative structure and a clear beginning, middle, and end.** Look for examples on pages 19-26.
4. **Holdable Art.** These books stand out because of their exceptional illustrations. Wordless picture books, especially, belong here. You can find examples on pages 30-34.
5. **Books that tell relatable, realistic stories.** Children recognize familiar routines and learn more about themselves and others. Check pages 36-41 for examples. .
6. **Concept books** that focus on things like the alphabet, counting, colors, and opposites. You've seen examples on pages 42-48.
7. **Educator- and child-created books.** These can be as simple as a few pages stapled together or as fancy as a professionally printed photo book. They help children recall experiences and express themselves. See 49 - 58 for examples.

Hint: Sticky notes are one easy way to label each stack. Some books may fit more than one category. Place them where they seem to fit best. Once you've sorted your books, consider the following questions.

- Which do you have the most of? Why might that be?
- Are any categories lacking or missing altogether? How might you find books to add to these categories?
- What else do you notice about your book collection?
- When and how do you use each type of book with children?
- How do you currently make books visible and easy for children to use independently? And, how else might you create appealing opportunities for children to choose and use books?

Educators in Love with Reading

In a recent survey, we invited Arkansas educators to share their memories about books and reading. Here are a few of your responses.

What was your earliest memory of falling in love with reading?

“My mom was a reader and we spent many days taking trips to the library. My sister and I also got Little Golden Books as rewards for listening on shopping trips.”

- Danielle Stover

“I'd visit my grandparents with a stack of books starting around age 7. They had this beautiful large tree in their far backyard corner. It had thick branches but they grew low and were easy to climb. I'd tuck myself into the tree and read.”

- Katie Williams

“My mom passed her love of reading to us. If my busy mother was sitting still, she had a book in her hand.”

- Rita Neve

Do you recall a particular book that contributed to your love of reading?

“I remember my kindergarten teacher reading aloud from *Charlotte's Web* before nap. She did all the voices, and I would close my eyes and imagine I was Fern.”

-Mandi Edmonds

“I can remember being about first grade and my favorite children's author was Dr. Seuss. I remember having a membership to a book club. I was excited and looked forward every month to getting those books in the mail. The first two books that I fell in love with were *Green Eggs and Ham* and *Fox in Socks*.”

-Gaynell Jamison

As a child...I hated to read, it was hard, and I had to reread everything multiple times before I understood any text. Then, I grew up and had children. Reading to them was such a special time. We read everything. When the story made us giggle, it was magic. These shared moments spurred me to become an avid reader, getting past all my barriers by finding books that captured my imagination.

- Carol Evans

What else would you like to tell us about falling in love with reading?

“A good book changes how you view the world; GOOD writing gives words to your deepest feelings that you didn't know COULD be articulated, and when the world inside of a story feels so real to you that you ache for it after you finish the book--THAT is one of the most impactful things. Readers live a million lives, walk in the shoes of others, and learn so much!”

- Katie Williams

“The big event of our month when I was growing up was our monthly trip to the library. We each could check out ten books. So we brought fifty books home! To make sure they all were returned Mom kept a ledger listing each book. Those ledgers were a treasure. We could go back and find the title of a well-loved book so we could check it out again.”

- Rita Neve

“No matter when it happens, it is never too late to fall in love with reading.”

-Carol Evans



Feeling inspired? If you'd like to share your story of falling in love with reading, go to <https://bit.ly/ACW25Survey> or scan the code.



Helping Families Fall in Love with Reading

Children who experience joyful, interactive reading with their families at home develop an affinity for books and build a strong foundation for future reading success. In fact, many studies suggest that family reading habits can be a powerful predictor of children's reading proficiency in later years. Early childhood and out-of-school time programs can support families by fostering positive book-related experiences.

Amp Up Access to Books

It's difficult for families to read together if they don't have regular access to appealing, age-appropriate books, but we can help. Here are some ideas to consider.

Offer book-sharing resources for families.

This could be as simple as a swap box in the lobby of your program or the cubby area of your room. Children can bring books they have lost interest in to trade for something new. Or, enlist volunteers to help build an outdoor book box where families and others can take or leave books. You can find tips for starting a Little Free Library at <https://littlefreelibrary.org/>.



Launch a book kit program.

Build story bags or boxes that families can check out. Each kit might contain two or three topical books and a puppet or other prop. A tip sheet can be included to suggest extension activities. For example, a family might play hide and seek with a stuffed toy dog after reading *Where's Spot?* You can find dozens of free, ready-to-print story kits by searching for "Adventure Packs" at www.readingrockets.org.



Connect families with at-home reading programs.

You might begin by inviting a local librarian to speak at a family night event. For first-time parents with young children, especially, it can be reassuring to know that even the busiest, noisiest little ones are welcomed warmly at the children's library! You could also share information about summer reading programs for schoolagers, bookmobile routes, and more.

Several national and regional programs also offer free books for children.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

<https://arkansasimaginationlibrary.org/>

All children in a participating community can enroll at birth or when they move into the area. Each month until their 5th birthday, a new picture book arrives in the mailbox. The Dollywood Foundation developed the delivery system, selects titles, and works with publishers. Regional champions in the community—businesses, school districts, civic organizations, individuals, and/or local government—help finance the cost of the books, register children, and promote the program.

Lisa Libraries

www.lisalibraries.org

Created in memory of children's book editor Lisa Novak, the Lisa Libraries support child care programs, out-of-school time programs, and others in low-income and underserved areas. They can help establish or restock program libraries or furnish books for children to take home.

Host a book drive.

Ask local churches, scout groups, or service groups to participate in a book drive to collect gently-used children's books for your organization. Families with children slightly older than those you serve may be happy to share books their family has outgrown.

Offer Opportunities to Share and Savor Books Together

We can find ways throughout the year to spotlight and celebrate reading!

Share recommendations.

Include a recommended reading list in each newsletter that you share with families. Suggest favorite books that are:

- Age-appropriate and engaging
- Easy to read
- Readily available at your local library
- Connected to children's current topics of learning



Children who see their parents reading are more likely to become avid readers themselves. Consider recommending a few book suggestions for adults, too. For example, you might share resource books about guidance, child development, and ways to help children learn at home. You could even start a book club for parents, grandparents, and other interested adults.

Plan a reading event.

Your program might participate in Jumpstart's annual *Read for the Record*. Last year, 2.3 million early childhood readers in 11 countries united to read the same book on the same day. Find out more at www.readfortherecord.org. Your program could also host an author visit, organize a read-a-thon, or have a family book night. With a bit of planning, your program can hold an event that will get children and families excited about reading.

Celebrate with stories.

Include a story time when families join you for holiday celebrations, open house events, and other activities. It's an opportunity for educators to model read-aloud techniques and for families to see how much their children enjoy books. Plus, it highlights books and stories as a valuable part of traditions and festivities.



Birthday books offer another way to celebrate. Programs stock up on low-priced books from Scholastic.com and elsewhere. These are placed in a festive, gift-wrapped box. Each child is invited to select a book from the box to take home on their birthday. Staff members might write a special birthday message inside the front cover to commemorate the child's special day.

Invite guest readers and storytellers.

Welcome families to come in to share books and stories with children. Even older siblings can get in on the fun! Because engaging a large group requires timing, talent, and an understanding of group dynamics, consider alternatives to whole-group storytimes. For example, it may be far more comfortable for everyone to include a casual guest reader during outdoor play; children can come and go from the story area as they please.

Provide Information About Reading Development

We can share information to help families formulate age-guided expectations. This can include information on how language, phonemic awareness, and first reading skills emerge and suggestions about short, participatory storytimes.

Make a night of it.

Host a literacy-themed family meeting. Demonstrate read-aloud strategies and playful activities that families use at home and on the go.

Share tips.

Reading Rockets offers free, printable tip sheets for family members of children from birth to third grade. If you're viewing this book online, you may use the direct links below. Or, if you're viewing a print copy of this book, go to www.readingrockets.org and enter "reading tips" in the search bar.

[Tips for Reading with Babies](#)

[Tips for Reading with Toddlers](#)

[Tips for Reading with Preschoolers](#)

[Tips for Reading with Kindergarteners](#)

[Tips for Reading with First Graders](#)

[Tips for Reading with Second Graders](#)

[Tips for Reading with Third Graders](#)



You can also find literacy resources for educators and families on the Arkansas Better Beginnings website, <https://arbetterbeginnings.com>.

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents."

-Emilie Buchwald

Experiences by Age Group

Creative educators can adapt almost any activity to suit the abilities of their age group. As written, the “Now Try This” experiences in this book are best suited for these age groups.

| | Page | Infants and Younger Toddlers | Two-Year-Olds and Younger Preschoolers | Preschoolers and Kindergarteners | Schoolagers |
|---------------------------|------|------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Book Hospital | 10 | | ● | ● | ● |
| Bringing Books to Life | 10 | ● | ● | ● | |
| Topical Book Basket | 18 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Using Informational Books | 18 | | ● | ● | ● |
| Extending a Story | 27 | | ● | ● | |
| Telling a Trickster Tale | 28 | | ● | ● | ● |
| An Illustrator Study | 35 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Making a Concept Book | 48 | ● | ● | ● | |
| Telling Their Own Story | 59 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Storytelling Basket | 59 | | | ● | ● |
| From Story to Stage | 60 | | ● | ● | ● |
| Assessing Our Library | 61 | ● | ● | ● | ● |

High-Value Interactions for Educators

- Sharing books with rhyming words - page 3
- Sharing books with playful sounds - page 7
- Sharing informational books - page 13
- Reading aloud with groups - pages 21 - 25
- Sharing concept books - page 48



Childhood Services



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY
& SECONDARY EDUCATION