

READING: 
BIRTH
TO AGE 5

Introduction

WHY READING IS SO IMPORTANT

Today, preparing children for school has taken on a new meaning. In the past, to ready their children at home for kindergarten, parents needed to develop only their child’s social and emotional skills (e.g., interacting well with other children, following directions, sharing, taking turns). Now parents often expect that their children should enter kindergarten knowing their ABCs and how to count (Nurss & Hodges, 1982).

Besides a change in the expectations of parents, other shifts are occurring in our society that impact our youngest children (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000):

- More women are in the workforce than ever before, which means more children are in child care or preschool.
- There is increasing evidence of, and conviction from educators, that preschool children should receive some form of educational experience.
- There is growing evidence from early childhood research that indicates early childhood education has a positive correlation with school performance.

In response to these changes, our child care centers and preschools now are emphasizing literacy development. These early years—birth to age 5—are crucial in the physical, emotional, social, and educational (through sight, sound, and memory) development of prereading, language, vocabulary, and number skills (Michigan State Board of Education, 2002). A child’s ability to learn to read and write is linked to age-related development (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998); and speaking, reading, and writing—literacy

skills—are all linked in terms of learning (Strickland & Morrow, 1989), so exposing your child to language in all of its forms from birth is an important piece of this puzzle.

Besides reading to your child, it is important to model the behavior you want to see. Seeing you read at home for pleasure as well as for information provides a glimpse for your child of the value of reading in our everyday lives. Make sure you convey the fun, excitement, and adventure children can experience through reading!

Efforts to foster early literacy place new emphasis on tools you can use at home with your child to prepare for a smooth transition into the school years. This acts as a guide for parents, relatives, caregivers, and anyone interested in preparing children for a successful transition into their school experience. These tools are not meant to replace formal education but serve to introduce very young children to reading and literacy skills in general. These tools can prepare them for the more complete, thorough, and serious approach taken in school.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

To better understand the tools described below, let's first consider the different developmental stages children reach between birth and age 5. Remember that since children are individuals, their growth and development will vary and they can reach these stages at very different times, just as two 3-year-olds can be very different in height.

Because the developmental milestones for newborns through age 5 vary greatly, we have broken them down into increments. Again, it is important to remember that these are guidelines. Your child's development will vary over time, but just as children have growth spurts, their developmental stages can be reached suddenly. If you have concerns about your child's development, please contact your local school or school district office, doctor, or county health department for a screening.

BY 6 MONTHS



- Speaks with different pitches of voice.
- Responds to hearing his or her name.
- Responds to a voice by turning his or her head.
- Responds to angry and happy voices (Child Development Institute, 2005).

BY 1 YEAR



- Uses one or more words.
- Understands basic instructions, especially if given vocal clues or gestures.
- Is aware of the social aspect of speech (i.e., why speech is important) (Child Development Institute, 2005).

BY 18 MONTHS



- Has accumulated a vocabulary of 5–20 words, mostly nouns (e.g., things around the house).
- Repeats a word or phrase multiple times.
- Follows some simple commands (Child Development Institute, 2005).

BY 2 YEARS



- Names a number of objects in the environment.
- Has a vocabulary of 15–300 words.
- Uses one or two pronouns (e.g., I, me, he, she, it, you) correctly (Child Development Institute, 2005).
- Asks to be read to.
- Recognizes a favorite book by its cover.
- Pretends to read a book.
- Understands how to handle a book.
- Points to and labels different objects in the illustrations of familiar books.
- Listens to stories (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).
- Follows a two- or three-part command.
- Recognizes and identifies almost all common objects.
- Understands most sentences.
- Uses four- or five-word sentences.
- Understands the concept of “place” relations (e.g., on, above, below).
- Uses some plurals (e.g., dogs, cats, beds) (Shelov & Hannemann, 2004).
- Makes up-and-down and side-to-side lines on paper.
- Draws circular images (Shelov & Hannemann, 2004).

BY 3 YEARS



- Correctly names some colors.
- Understands the concept of counting and may know a few numbers.
- Follows three-part commands.
- Recalls parts of a story.
- Understands the concepts of “same” and “different.”
- Masters some basic rules of grammar.
- Speaks in sentences of five to six words (Shelov & Hannemann, 2004).
- Copies square shapes.
- Draws a person with two to four body parts.
- Draws circles and squares.
- Begins to copy some capital letters (Shelov & Hannemann, 2004).

BY 4 OR 5 YEARS (GETTING READY FOR KINDERGARTEN)



- Counts 10 or more objects.
 - Names at least four colors correctly.
 - Can recall part of a story.
 - Uses future tense (“I will read the book”).
 - Tells longer stories.
 - Can say his or her own name and address.
 - Copies triangles and other shapes.
- Draws a person with a body.
 - Prints some letters (Shelov & Hannemann, 2004).

BY 5 YEARS (GOING INTO KINDERGARTEN)



- Listens carefully to a book being read.
 - Speaks in longer sentences.
 - Develops understanding of rhyming and recognizing ending phonemes (i.e., speech sounds that make one word different from another).
 - Attempts to write messages by scribbling.
- Knows the difference between letters and pictures.
 - Recognizes the letters in his or her own name (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003).



At-Home Activities

FOR CHILDREN BIRTH TO AGE 2

A child learns more between birth and age 2 than any other period of life (Michigan State Board of Education, 2002) so it is important to talk to babies from the time they are born to stimulate that learning ability. Use any opportunity while feeding, dressing, or bathing to talk about what you are doing. By talking, you instill the meaning of words and the ability to speak (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Rhymes, songs, and gestures will teach your baby about language (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Reading out loud with expression is crucial to conveying the meaning of spoken words (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003). Using different voices for different characters also can be entertaining (Child Literacy Centre, 2005). For example, when you read the *Three Little Pigs*, you can make your voice sound one way for the pigs and another, more gruff way for the wolf. Some ideas for engaging the very young child follow.



LET'S TALK, TALK, TALK!

In this activity, you talk with your child, using descriptive, expressive language. It is important to talk to babies from the time they are born. The object is to use many different words to describe the situation, giving your baby exposure to new words. Use any opportunity while feeding, dressing, or bathing to talk about what you are doing. The following are some ideas for a very young child:

While Feeding. Ask the baby if he or she is hungry. Describe how the food tastes (e.g., cold, warm, yummy) as the baby is fed. Use the same words each time. Babies respond positively to repetitive language. For example: “Are you hungry? Would you like some yummy apple sauce? It really tastes good, doesn’t it? I bet you would like some yummy sweet potatoes, too! Let’s see what other yummy things we can find for you to eat.”

While Dressing. When dressing the baby, carry on a conversation. Show the baby each piece of clothing, while naming it. For example, “Would you like to wear your blue shirt today?” Then describe the task of putting it on: “I’m going to pull this pretty pink sweater over your head. Now

let's put your right arm in the sleeve. Now, your left. Oh, don't you look nice!"

Bath Time. This can be enjoyable for a baby and caregiver, especially when using fun words such as splash, soapy, and slippery to describe what is going on. For example, "Bath time is really fun, isn't it? Here we go! Splash, splash, splash! Now you try to splash the water!"

Outdoor Walks. During walks, be sure to name all the things you are seeing, such as birds, flowers, trees, and grass. For example, "Don't you just love talking a walk on such a sunny day? Oh, look up in the tree. There's a red bird. I love watching the birds fly. Oh, there he goes. Do you see any other birds?"

LET'S SING, SING, SING!

In this activity—similar to "Let's Talk, Talk, Talk!"—you sing with your child, using different pitches in your voice to convey meaning and impart interest.

LET'S PLAY, PLAY, PLAY!

Play simple games with your child, such as "Peek-a-Boo" and "Patty Cake." Such games not only provide opportunities for motion (e.g., hiding your eyes, clapping your hands), but they also provide rhyming opportunities (e.g., "Peek-a-boo, I see you;" "Patty cake, patty cake, baker's man, bake me a cake as fast as you can!").

LET'S READ, READ, READ!

Because reading is so important for the birth-to-age-2 group, spend as much time as possible with your child reading a variety of texts and using different voices and inflections. Reading should be brief but frequent.

FOR CHILDREN AGES 2 AND 3

By the time children are 2–3 years old, they become more independent. Hands-on activities and playtime are very important during these stages of development. This is also when children begin imitating older children and adults (Parents' Action for Children, 2005). For example, when you are speaking, your child may repeat your words back to you. This should be encouraged because your toddler is learning critical skills on a path to literacy. The following activities will help nurture an interest in reading and writing.

MOMMY/DADDY SAYS

Building a young child's awareness of speech and vocabulary is very important. Using the model of "Simon Says," parents can play "Mommy/Daddy Says" in the following way. Say "Mommy says ... touch your nose," and the baby touches his or her nose; or "Daddy says ... touch your spoon." Everyone in the family can join in this game. Even the child can take his or her turn by saying "[Child's name] says ... touch your tummy," and everyone responds appropriately.

FINDING A HOME FOR YOUR BOOKS

It is important to create a special, very accessible place—a library—to store books (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Having books always available in your child's own special spot increases the likelihood that he or she will read (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

- Find a container, such as an oblong box or laundry basket. This shape is preferable so the books can stand upright, making it easy for a child to select one to read.
- From time to time, change the titles so your preschooler has new books to experience. In addition, vary the kinds of books—some about animals, some about letters, and some about numbers.

- Make sure your child understands that these books can be read at any time, but they need to be put away carefully afterward. This is greatly encouraged if you let your child help you pick out a good location for the book box.

PREDICTABLE BOOKS

Predictable or patterned books (i.e., books in which the story unfolds as you expect it to) use rhymes and repetitive language in which each response at the end of one sentence becomes the beginning for the next sentence. This invites the young reader to make predictions or guesses quickly about the words or the story. Usually, the first page sets the pattern for the rest of the book. As the story goes on, only a few words are changed to reflect what is coming next in the story. The pictures on each page reinforce these text changes. Predicting words and storylines encourages children to “pretend read,” giving them self-confidence to continue their literacy journey to real reading.

- Select a predictable book, such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin & Carle, 1992).
- Discuss what the child sees on the first page (in this example, a brown bear and a red bird).
- Read the words out loud.
- Follow this technique throughout the book. After a while, the child will start to “read” with you.

After reading predictable books, children also enjoy follow-up activities. For instance, in the book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (1981), the author highlights the days-of-the-week and number concepts. After reading the story, parents could help their child keep track of the food he or she eats each day of the week. Use a



blank calendar to note the name of the food and how much was eaten. For example, “On Monday, I ate one sandwich. On Tuesday, I ate two cookies. On Wednesday, I ate three red grapes” (Routman, 1988).

Using books with storylines that emphasize number concepts or the days of the week is beneficial for a child’s learning. Books that have lift-up flaps or cut-out holes on each page help children predict the essence of the storyline. Use predictable books to help children make predictions about the words on any given page.

For more ideas about predictable books, see the Resources section.

WORDLESS BOOKS

These books have no written text. The story is told entirely with pictures. Parents can read to their children by using the pictures to tell the story. They also can be used by adults for whom reading is difficult. Children, in turn, can use these books to read to parents by using the pictures as guides for a story.

- Take a picture walk through the book, letting the child talk about what is in the pictures.
- Then go back through the book so the child can be the “author” and make up a story that might fit with the pictures.
- Write the child’s story on sticky notes as they tell it and attach them to each page. The new story then can be shared with other family members and friends.

Picture Books. Some wordless books contain only pictures of objects. For these books, the name of each object can be written on sticky notes. While writing the name of the object, each letter can be spoken. In this way, the child not only can start to recognize common letters but also identify them when they are used in the names of other objects or family members.

Counting Books. Another category of wordless books includes counting books. These books, such as Mitsumasa Anno's (1977) *Anno's Counting Book*, provide children with opportunities to count items in scenes. On each page is the featured number with the corresponding number of blocks as a secondary guide.

NURSERY RHYMES

Nursery rhymes (i.e., short poems for children written in rhyming verse and handed down through folklore or by tradition) are favorites of all children because they are excellent vehicles for playacting.

- When reading books, the rhyming words should be emphasized. For example, when reading “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” (how I wonder what you are), you will stress the words “star” and “are” by changing the tone of your voice. After a while, the child may join in on the end of each sentence to supply the rhyme.
- After reading a book several times, use one or two of the words and ask your child to suggest different words that rhyme. In the song “Down by the Bay,” some of the rhymes could be “Did you ever see a bear eating a ...?” (pear) or “Did you ever see a bear sitting on a ...?” (chair).
- After reading a rhyme several times, ask your child how it can be performed. With your guidance, it can be practiced a few times. After several nursery rhymes are ready, your 3-year-old can put on a nursery rhyme play. After each rhyme has been acted out, the child can lead the members of the “audience” in doing the same.

Refreshments can be used to reinforce the nursery rhyme theme—deviled eggs for “Humpty Dumpty,” pudding or pie for “Georgie Porgie,” apple juice or sliced apples for “An Apple a Day,” sugar cookies for “What Little Girls Are Made of,” ice cream for “I Scream, You Scream,” or a tea party for “Polly Put the Kettle on.”

RHYMING BOOKS

Many rhyming books are written as songs, such as “Mary Had a Little Lamb” or “Down by the Bay.” Others can be set to music by just singing the words to a familiar song. For instance, “Ole King Cole” and “Humpty Dumpty” can be set to the tune of the “ABC” song:

*Ole King Cole was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he.
He called for his pipe, and he called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three.
Ole King Cole was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he!*

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.
Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall!*

You also can help your child make up an original tune to go with the words.

MATCHING SOUNDS

In learning to read, children must isolate the beginning sounds of words. The ability to tell the difference between the individual sounds (phonemes) that make up a word is called *phonemic awareness*. When beginning school, phonemic awareness and knowing the alphabet are the two best predictors of how well children will learn to read during the first two years of reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Practice this skill by asking your child to tell you which words in a series begin with the same sound or which sound doesn't belong (e.g., moon, mouse, goat; little, big, large; go, come, candy).

You also can play the “Sound Game.” Using a wordless book or a magazine, point to a picture and say the name of an object in the picture. Then ask, “What sound do you hear in the beginning of this word?” Make this a fun activity and put no pressure on the child to be correct. If a wrong sound is given, simply say, “I heard [verbalize sound] at the beginning.” For example, if you see a mouse in a book, say “mouse,” then ask your child, “What sound do you hear at the beginning of this word?” Your child should answer “the ‘mmm’ sound” or something similar.

AS SIMPLE AS ABC

By sharing the alphabet, you will help your child begin to recognize the shapes of the letters and the sounds that correspond with them. The following exercise, As Simple as ABC, was provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2005). You’ll need alphabet books, ABC magnets, paper, pencils, crayons, markers, glue, and safety scissors.

- With your 2- or 3-year-old sitting with you, print the letters of his or her name on paper. Make sure you say each letter as you write it.
- Make a name sign for your child’s room or some special place, such as where he or she hangs up his or her coat.
- Let your child decorate the sign with stickers or drawings.

FOR CHILDREN STARTING KINDERGARTEN AGES 4 AND 5

By about the age of 4, language skills will have developed to where repeating words with four syllables is commonplace. The preschooler also will be talking excessively while doing other things. By age 5, your child will begin to grasp the idea of opposites, know simple time concepts (e.g., today, tomorrow, yesterday), and have a vocabulary that includes many descriptive words that are used spontaneously (Child Development Institute, 2005). The following are some activities that will help develop these skills in preparation for kindergarten.

HOW DOES PRINT WORK?

Spend some time with your child, explaining how print works by pointing to text or following along with your finger while you read a favorite book. This shows your child that English text is read from left to right, from the top of the page to the bottom, and from the left page to the right page before turning to the next page. It is important that your child has this print awareness in order to master reading a book or understanding other visual cues in the future.

KNOWING THE ALPHABET

The following three activities are designed to help children prepare for kindergarten. They introduce and create practice for recognizing letters and their sounds. Children who enter kindergarten knowing their ABCs usually have a much easier time learning to read than children who do not.

Sound of the Week.

- Choose a letter or sound to highlight, such as the first letter of your child's or a pet's name, or find something in the kitchen, such as the stove, and use its first letter.
- Using a wide marker, write the letter on an 8-1/2x11 piece of paper and put it in plain sight on the refrigerator door. Make a collage of pictures corresponding with that letter.
- Every morning, ask your child to think of something that begins with the same sound as the letter of the week. In the beginning, you might want to use items in one room of the house, such as the kitchen. The letter "M" might bring up milk, microwave, meat, mom, mixer, and me; the letter "S" should get sink, salt, soap, salad, and stepstool.

A follow-up activity for each letter sound of the week is to have your child find and cut out pictures from a magazine that all start with that letter sound and make a collage, which is created by taking a group of cut-out pictures and attaching them to paper with glue or tape.

Story ABCs.

- Write a letter on a piece of paper and place it in your child's view.
- Tell your child to listen carefully to a story. You are going to want to know if your child heard words in the story that begin with the sound written on the paper. Be sure you review the sound before and after the reading.

- In the beginning, use only sounds with which your child is familiar, such as the first sound in his or her name, "mommy" or "daddy," a pet's name, or a sibling's name. If you are using the Sound of the Week activity, sounds that have been studied also can be used.
- Read the story out loud then point to the piece of paper with the letter written on it and say, "Did you hear a word in the story that started with the sound this letter makes?"
- If the child cannot answer, then you can say, "I heard the word 'mommy,' and it starts with the sound that this letter makes [point to the letter]." Then say the sound made by the letter: "It makes the 'mmm' sound."

It is important to keep repeating the same sounds until your child becomes adept at this activity.

The ABCs and Me.

- Using an ABC book, point to the capital letter and say it.
- Next, point to the lower case letter and say it.
- Finally, point to the picture that begins with the same sound and say it.
- Have your child do the same letter with you.
- Repeat for all of the letters.
- When your child has become familiar with the letter names and pictures, add the sound each letter makes.
- When this exercise has become automatic, cover everything on the page except the letter. Ask your child to give the sound that each letter makes.

Always be the "guide on the side" to help. Often children are not ready for this activity until they have started attending kindergarten.



WORD WALL

A Word Wall is an alphabetic display of frequently used words selected from your child's personal speaking and reading vocabulary. This encourages on-sight word recognition—words that readers instantly recognize without having to figure them out. Instant recognition of these words helps promote independence as your child learns more about reading and writing.

- Write each of the alphabet letters, lower and upper case (e.g., A a, B b, C c), on 3x5 index cards.
- Arrange the cards in alphabetical order on a blank wall that a small child can reach.
- With your child, write his or her name on a 3x5 card. Say each letter out loud as you write.
- Let your child help you “find” the right letter and place the card under it.
- Sing the ABC song while touching each letter card with a pointer.
- Let your child use the pointer and sing the song again.
- At least once a week, add another word to the Word Wall. In the beginning, you might wish to use some of the following: mom, dad, or siblings' names, or friends' names.
- At the end of each session, ask your child to point out a word that you say. Later, the child may wish to “find a word” from a clue that you give (e.g., “Find and read the ‘m’ word ... mom.”).

Children also like to play “I Spy” with the Word Wall words. You can do this by saying, “I spy with my little eye a word that begins with “G” and is someone who loves you very much. What do you think it is?” (Possible answers: Grandma, Grandpa)

RETELL THE STORY

Asking children to retell a story after it has been read provides an excellent opportunity for them to use their verbal and recall skills. During the retelling, you need to encourage your child to use expressive language to relate the details in the story. This attention to detail increases the length of spoken sentences and vocabulary knowledge. Read aloud a narrative story, then ask your child to retell it in sequence.

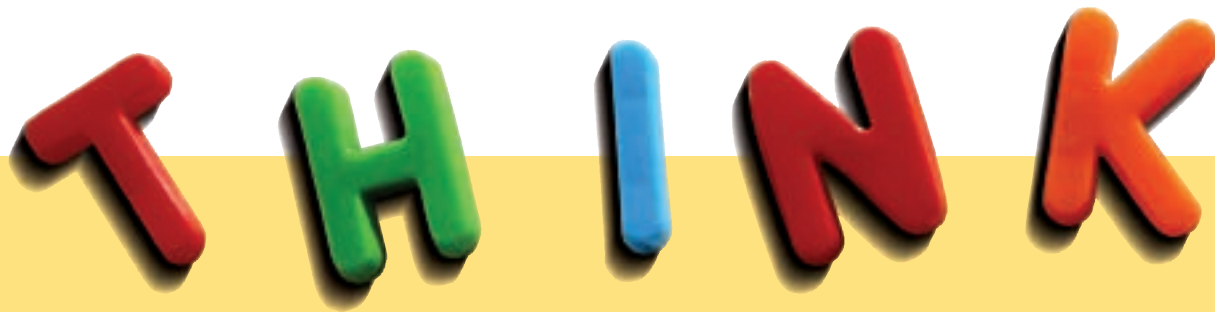
If this is difficult in the beginning, use the pictures to help trigger your child's recall. It also will help if you ask, “What happened first?” and then “What happened next?” and so on. This type of probing will give direction for the retelling. If this is still too difficult, start with, “In the beginning of the story, I remember ...” then ask your child “What happened next?” You can continue taking turns until the entire story has been retold.

As your child retells the story, either tape it or transcribe it. Go back over the story, making sure the characters and setting have been included. It is also a good idea to check that the storyline is in the proper order.

DIDJA KNOW?

Didja Know? helps children grasp the meaning of something and to remember details. After reading an expository (nonfiction) book, Didja Know? can be played with the family. Your child tells the members of the family facts he or she has learned that, perhaps, are unknown to others. Each fact should begin with “Didja know ...?”

This game also can be played between the two people who read the book together. Taking turns, each person asks the question “Didja know ...?”



CHANGE OR WRITE THE ENDING

In the beginning, it is important that this activity be modeled for your child so he or she understands what type of response is expected.

- Select a narrative book. It can be familiar or unfamiliar to the child.
- Read until almost the end of the story at which the problem in the story is to be solved.
- Stop and ask your child to decide how the story should end.
- Write the ending down and put it inside the book for safekeeping.
- Finish reading the book and let your child decide which ending is preferred. Be sure that you also comment on the ending you liked the best.

I THINK ... I THINK ... I THINK!

This encourages a child to make a prediction or a statement about what they think will happen in the future. To fully understand what is being read, a child needs to be provided with activities that develop thinking skills. By using the knowledge your child already has about the world, along with the new information your child learns during reading, he or she can then make logical predictions as to what might happen next in the story. Most children are so busy trying to pronounce the words that they have little energy left to do this. A method such as “I Think” helps your child focus away from the page. “I think ...” is repeated three times to reinforce that it is important to take time to think before speaking. This is sometimes called “wait time” or “think time.”

- During book-reading time, stop at an appropriate place and say, “I think ... I think ... I think” and follow with a prediction about what might happen next in the story. After several experiences with this, encourage your child to jump in and make a prediction.

- It is always important to remember that logical predictions are never considered wrong. A prediction is simply a forecast of the next part of the story based on the child’s prior knowledge.
- After a while, your child may even stop the reader and say, “I think ... I think ... I think.”

POET IN RESIDENCE

Children enjoy making up their own poems. This helps increase the ability to hear and identify ending sounds—an essential component in learning to read. This can be done anytime and anywhere, including a car ride. Ask your child to think of rhyming words and then use the two words in silly sentences that rhyme. Your child also can ask someone else to do the same thing. The following is an example:

Parent: “You’re getting ready for bed. Think of a word that rhymes with ‘bed.’”

Child: “My word is ‘fed.’ I’m going to bed. Has the cat been fed?”

Parent: “Now I’ll do one. My word is ‘red.’ Look at your bed. The pillow is red.”

MUSICIAN IN RESIDENCE

Building a child’s self-esteem is important because many children are fearful that they will never learn to read. A few activities, such as performing for one’s family, can build confidence. The message important for your preschooler to learn is that practice is key to becoming a successful reader.

- Pick out a favorite children’s song.
- Sing it with your child.
- Have the child practice it alone several times.
- Arrange a time when the song can be performed for other family members. Some songs may even be audience-participation songs.

Below are some examples of songs.

“Down by the Bay”

by Raffi

*Down by the bay, where the watermelons grow,
Back to my home, I dare not go.
For if I do, my mother will say,
Did you ever see a goose kissing a moose,
Down by the bay?
Did you ever have a time, when you couldn't make a rhyme,
Down by the bay?*

Any animals can be used. For example, “duck without any luck,” “pig wearing a wig,” “bee who lost his key.”

“Old MacDonald Had a Farm”

Author unknown

*Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O!
And on his farm he had a (some) duck(s), E-I-E-I-O!
With a quack-quack here and a quack-quack there,
Here a quack, there a quack, everywhere a quack-quack.
Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O!*

“What Do Farm Animals Say”

(to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb”)

*Little pigs say oink, oink, oink, oink, oink, oink, oink, oink, oink.
Little pigs say oink, oink, oink
All day long.*

Children can make up the rest of the verses, such as:

*Little cows say moo, moo, moo ...
Little lambs say baa, baa, baa ...
Little chicks say peep, peep, peep ...*

“Five Little Ducks Went Out to Play”

*Five little ducks went out to play
Over the pond and far away.
Mother Duck said, “Quack, quack, quack!”
And four little ducks came back.*

*Four little ducks went out to play
Over the pond and far away.
Mother Duck said, “Quack, quack, quack!”
And three little ducks came back.*

*Three little ducks went out to play
Over the pond and far away.
Mother Duck said, “Quack, quack, quack!”
And two little ducks came back.*

*Two little ducks went out to play
Over the pond and far away.
Mother Duck said, “Quack, quack, quack!”
And one little duck came back.*

*One little duck went out to play
Over the pond and far away.
Mother Duck said, “Quack, quack, quack!”
But no little ducks came back.*

*There were no little ducks going out to play,
Over the pond and far away.
Then Father Duck said, “QUACK, QUACK, QUACK!”
And five little ducks came back.*

AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR IN RESIDENCE

Most children like to write and illustrate stories of their own. This is great for increasing reading and writing skills and should be encouraged.

With careful guidance by an adult, story elements (e.g., setting, characters, plot, solution) can be practiced along with appropriate illustrations. A story also can be created

based on a favorite television show or video game. By following the directions, you can use the content from many sources to create a homemade book with your child's version of the story.

- Explain to your child that he or she can write a story.
- Share with your child the characters, the setting, and a problem to be solved. If your child has trouble thinking of something to use, suggest a family story that has been handed down as a good place to start.
- Ask your child to dictate the story, sentence by sentence, to you or another adult. No more than two sentences should be on each page. Verbalize each letter as your child speaks the words.
- Ask the child to read back what has been written after each sentence.
- When the story has been written down completely, read it again all the way through. This can be done in several ways:
 - As an echo reading (you read first, your child echoes what you have said).
 - As an assisted reading (you help your child with the words during the reading).
 - A partner reading (you and your child take turns reading page by page).
 - An independent reading (your child reads the entire story alone).
- Use a favorite book to show the importance of pictures, then your child can illustrate each page.
- Design a cover page, title page, and dedication page; then bind the book. Bindings can be as simple as stapling, using brads, or even sewing the pages together.

- These steps do not need to happen in one session; they can be stretched out for several days. The stories can be shared with other members of the family, friends, and teachers.

Children live in a print-rich environment. Writing is everywhere; in books, on television, on cereal boxes, on street signs, and more. Children learn about print by seeing these examples everywhere every day. Take every opportunity to encourage them to practice what they know about print. This reinforces their knowledge of reading and writing.

HERE'S A HUG FOR YOU

Ask your child to write a note (called a "hug") to a family member, teacher, neighbor, or friend each week. This can be done in the following ways:

- Your child can draw a message.
- Your child can dictate the message with you or an older sibling doing the writing.
- Your child can do the "writing," then you or an older sibling can write the correct spelling underneath each word to show "how it would look in a book."
 - Your child's "writing" can be left just as it is.
 - It is important that your child reads back the message when appropriate.
 - A drawing may accompany each "hug."
 - Each "hug" should be delivered by hand or mail.



TIME TO TALK

Set a special time aside each day (at least 10–15 minutes) when your 4- or 5-year-old can have a private talk with an adult member of your family. It is essential always to acknowledge, praise, and encourage your child to share thoughts, but also be sure that you share what you feel and believe.

At first, it may be necessary for you to start things off. Asking a specific question often gets a better response than a general comment. To get started, you might try one of the following:

- How would you describe a good friend?
- Would you look through this garden catalog with me so we can decide what kind and color of flowers we should plant this year?
- If we could go anywhere, where would you like to go? Why?
- What is your favorite game to play at recess?
- Do you think it is more fun watching TV or playing a game?
- Describe a day when you had fun.

Later on, topics for conversation could be more interactive. For example:

- Let's talk about the best thing that happened today. I'll go first, and then you can share.
- What was the worst thing that happened today? Do you want to go first, or shall I?
- I watched you taking care of the dog today. You were really caring. I was impressed. What were you thinking about when you did that?

LET'S IMAGINE

Another idea for conversation starters would be to play Let's Imagine. First you present a scenario then let your child respond. For instance, you might say, "Let's imagine that there were no more cars in our town anymore. What would that be like? How would that change our lives? What do you think?" If your child wants to, let him or her present a scenario to you.

WHAT DID YOU HEAR?

Reading aloud to children is very important. It is also very important that your child understands what is being read. Any type of book can be used for this activity.

- Select a book and determine stopping points in advance where it would be appropriate to ask your child, "What did you hear?"
- Start reading until you get to the first stopping point.
- Ask the question and listen to your child's response.
- When your child is finished, interject your own point of view. It also may be necessary to clarify any unknown vocabulary words or clear up any misunderstandings. This might be especially true if you are reading a nonfiction book on a topic about which your child has little prior knowledge.
- You and your child also could take turns responding as you reach each stopping point.

SAND WRITING

Young children are eager to learn to write letters, especially those in their own name. In the beginning, the “writing” is really just scribbling. However, as time goes on, actual letters begin to appear in the writing. At this time, it is important that you teach him or her how to form each letter correctly. Of course, crayon and paper work fine, but some novelty adds interest. Consider sand writing. Materials needed include a cookie sheet or other flat container and sand, sugar, flour, or corn meal.

- Put “sand” in the tray and ask your child to draw—with one finger or a pencil—each letter you say it. Start with only one or two letters. Accept either capital or lower case. The letters best to start with are those in the child’s name.
- Be prepared to help your child master the correct formation of letters.
- When your child has mastered these, encourage him or her to write the entire name in the sand.
- Continue this activity by using the names of other family members or the sight words you have posted on the Word Wall.
- On a poster, keep track of the letters that have been mastered to give your preschooler positive reinforcement.

IT’S SHOW TIME!

Children can learn about life through interactive and dramatic play. However, to learn from what they read and from what is read to them, they need creative opportunities to extend their understanding. In “writing” their own versions of favorite stories and designing characters chosen to tell the story, children not only learn how to understand the essence of a story but also benefit from performing their creations.

In It’s Show Time! the materials needed are old socks or small brown paper bags, crayons or markers, and an audience.

- Ask your child to name a favorite story of the week.
- Talk about the characters.
- Decide what characters would be needed to turn the story into a puppet show.
- Help your child make the puppets out of the socks or paper bags.
- If desired, yarn can be added for hair or material for clothing. Be creative.
- Practice the puppet show.
- Perform it for family members or friends.



Action

HOW CAN I USE THIS INFORMATION

The activities in this guide are a good starting point for you to help your child learn to read and write to prepare them for kindergarten. You can adjust any of these activities to fit your own family and/or personal schedule. For example, you can do some of these activities while you and your child are driving in your car, riding on a bus, or eating a meal together. Remember that of all of these, the most important is that you read to your child frequently, even if each time is brief.

EXPECTATIONS FOR QUALITY DAY CARE OR PRESCHOOL PLACEMENTS

More children are being placed in day care or preschool centers than ever before. The following are site, staff, and program details you may want to consider before placing your child in a day care or preschool center.

Cleanliness and orderliness

- The center should be clean and free from trash or things that could lead to illness.
- The center should be arranged so you can find your child's classroom or play area easily.
- When visiting the center, ask yourself whether you or your child would enjoy the setting.

Teacher credentials and teacher-to-child ratio

- Teachers should have some early childhood education credits or classes—preferably at least a two-year degree.
- Verify the skills of the caregivers or teachers with whom your child interacts by asking for more information from the center staff.
- Infants in the center's care should not number more than six to eight.
- The 2- and 3-year-olds should be in groups of 10–14 children.
- The 4- and 5-year-olds should be in groups of 16–20 children (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005).

Amount of time staff spends developing social skills

- The time spent on developing social skills is as important as time spent developing literacy skills and should include the following:
 - Learning how to get along with others.
 - Sharing.
 - Solving conflicts among others.

Amount of time spent in “literacy play”

- High-quality early childhood programs work on literacy issues in addition to social skills. The more opportunities to hear and see words, the more your child will be prepared for reading. Find out how much time is spent each day with the following:
 - Books
 - Sounds
 - Words
 - Letters
 - Read alouds

Materials available for children

- Early childhood programs, whether day care or preschool centers, should provide a variety of materials for children to use.
- While touring the center, look at the books, magazines, and puzzles available for the teacher or the children in the classroom. The more materials and resources available, the better.

Writing materials available for children

- Make sure the day care or preschool center has a variety of materials available for writing.
- Your child needs paper and writing instruments (e.g., pencils, crayons, paints) so he or she will become comfortable with holding a pen, scribbling letter-like shapes, and being expressive on paper—all important skills for learning to read and write.

Encouraged pretend writing and reading

- Even pretending to read and write helps children prepare for the next steps toward reading and writing.

- Children like to imitate adults by holding books and pretending to read the story by telling the story using the illustrations. These skills are necessary in learning to read and write.

Small groups reading and discussing stories

- The more of this there is, the better.
- In small groups, children have more opportunity to be engaged in a discussion of the story, reinforcing the story, and increasing comprehension.

Various music and rhythm activities

- The more time there is, the better.
- Music is an excellent way to introduce counting and numbers.

Time for conversation and listening to others speak

- As with time spent in small groups reading and discussing stories, it is best to have more time spent in conversation and listening to others.
- Practicing new vocabulary with others and listening to others’ language skills (and differences) help introduce new vocabulary to your child.
- Children also learn while listening to others speak and hearing others being corrected by a teacher.

Attitude regarding diversity of population and instruction

- A day care or preschool center that encourages diversity prepares children for K–12 and life in general.
- In addition to learning about other cultures or experiences, children will experience a variety of dialects, word uses, and styles; which, in turn, will build upon your child’s existing language knowledge.
- Look for instances of diversity in pictures and signage around the classroom and the center.

Glossary of Educational Terms

The following glossary contains words used in this document and when discussing literacy, reading, or education. These definitions were taken from the Education Oasis website (2005) unless otherwise specified.

Alphabetic principle: The idea that letters represent sound and that printed letters can be turned into speech (and vice versa).

Alphabetize: To arrange words in alphabetical order.

Characters: The actors represented in a story or drama (e.g., *Three Little Pigs*).

Comprehension: Process in which a reader constructs meaning while interacting with the text, using prior knowledge or experience (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Decoding: Analyzing graphic symbols (e.g., letters) to determine their intended meaning and sound.

Environmental print: Print that is all around us (e.g., street signs, labels on cans or jars, handwritten notes).

Fluency: The ability to read smoothly at an appropriate rate; the ability to read expressively when reading aloud.

Fluent reader: One who reads quickly, smoothly, and with expression; has a large store of sight words; automatically decodes unknown words; and self-corrects.

Intonation: The rise and fall of a person's voice while talking.

Literacy: The ability to read, write, communicate, and comprehend.

Phoneme: The smallest unit of speech that affects the meaning of a word; a sound unit (e.g., "c" in cat, "t" in mat, "e" in "get").

Phonemic awareness: The awareness of sounds in spoken words; the ability to orally hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds or segments of sound in words.

Phonics: A method of teaching reading that focuses on letter-sound relationships.

Plot: The structure of the action of a story; the events depicted in the order presented without reference to characterization, location, or motivation.

Print conventions and awareness: The rules of print; in the Western world, one reads from left to right and moves from the top to the bottom of the page, beginning on the left page and continuing to the right page before turning the right page; an awareness that print, in its many forms (see environmental print), has meaning.

Setting: The time and place in which a story occurs.

Solution: How the problem in the story is solved.

Syllable: A unit of sound or group of letters made up of a single vowel sound; consonant combination plus vowel sound.

Vocabulary: All of the words an individual knows, recognizes, and uses properly.



Resources

OBTAINING A LIBRARY CARD

One important and usually free resource is your local public library. Besides having books and materials available for check out, there are also scheduled story times when you can accompany your child and listen as you, and other families, hear stories read by a librarian. Often, story times are available for specific age groups and for bilingual (Spanish-English) groups. Check with your local library for more information.

CARDS FOR ADULTS

Library cards are usually free to all persons living within the limits of the city in which they reside. If you live outside the city limits, an annual fee may be charged. You need to provide a form of photo identification (e.g., driver's license, state identification card, consulate card, or passport) and a form of address confirmation (e.g., voter's registration, checks with name and address printed on them, current mail, insurance card, bill).

CARDS FOR CHILDREN

Usually a parent or guardian must accompany the child when applying for a card. Make sure you take some form of identification with you to obtain the card.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS ABOUT READING AND LITERACY FOR PARENTS

Beginning Literacy and Your Child: A Guide to Helping Your Baby or Preschooler Become a Reader, International Reading Association

Early Steps: Learning From a Reader, Carol Santa

Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read: Kindergarten Through Grade 3, Bonnie Armbruster, Fran Lehr, and Jean Osborn

The Read-Aloud Handbook, Jim Trelease

Read Me a Story, Please, Wendy Cooling and Penny Dann

Sing a Song of Popcorn: Every Child's Book of Poems,
Beatrice Schenk de Regniers, Eva Moore, Mary Michaels
White, and Jan Carr

*Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading
Success*, M. Susan Burns, Catherine E. Snow, and Peg Griffin

MAGAZINES AND CATALOGS THAT ENCOURAGE READING AT HOME

Babybug (6 months to 2 years)

Catalogs, such as J.C. Penney or toy catalogs

CLICK (ages 3–7)

Highlights (ages 2–12)

Ladybug (ages 2–6)

Nick Jr. Magazine (ages birth to 8)

Ranger Rick (ages 7 and older)

Sesame Street (ages 2–3)

Turtle (ages 3–5)

Wild Animal Baby (ages 1–4)

Your Big Backyard (ages 3–7)

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOOKS

(With Spanish Titles Included, if Available)

ABC Books.

ABC: A Child's First Alphabet Book, Alison Jay

Alphabetics, Susan MacDonald

Chicka, Chicka Boom, Boom, Bill Martin, Jr.

Dr. Seuss's ABCs: An Amazing Alphabet Boo, Dr. Seuss

The Handmade Alphabet, Laura Rankin

My First ABC Book, Jane Yorke

Wordless Books.

A Boy, a Dog, and a Frog, Mercer Mayer

Ah Choo, Mercer Mayer

Dylan's Day Out, Peter Catalanotto

Good Dog, Carl, Alexandra Day

Pancakes for Breakfast, Tomie dePaola

School, Emily McCully

Nursery Rhymes and Rhyming Books.

Beatrix Potter's Nursery Rhyme Book, Beatrix Potter

The Cat in the Hat, Dr. Seuss

Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed, Eileen Christelow

Green Eggs and Ham, Dr. Seuss

*The Little Dog Laughed: And Other Nursery Rhymes From
Mother Goose*, Lucy Cousins

*The Little Old Lady Who Wasn't Afraid of Anything
(Viejecita Que No Le Tenia a Nada)*,
Linda Williams

My First Mother Goose, Lisa McCue
The Original Mother Goose, Blanche Fisher Wright
Peek-A-Who!, Marie Torres Cimarusti
Put Me in the Zoo, Robert Lopshire
Richard Scarry's Best Mother Goose Ever, Richard Scarry
There's a Wocket in My Pocket, Dr. Seuss
Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose, Tomie dePaola
Tomie dePaola's Nursery Rhyme Book, Tomie dePaola

Predictable and Pattern Books.

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? (Oso Pardo, Oso Pardo, ¿Que Ves Ahi?), Bill Martin, Jr.
Chicka, Chicka Boom, Boom, Bill Martin, Jr.
The Three Little Javelins, Susan Lowell
Tikki Tikki Tembo (Tikki Tikki Tembo, Spanish edition), Arlene Mosel

Picture and Predictable Books.

A Chair for My Mother (Un Sillón Para Mi Mamá), Vera B. Williams
Alexander and the No Good, Very Bad Day (Alexander y el Día Terrible, Horrible, Espantoso, Horroroso), Judith Viorst
Blueberries for Sal, by Robert McCloskey
Bread and Jam for Francis (Pan y Mermelada Para Francisca), Russell Hoban
Caps for Sale: A Tale of a Peddle, Some Monkeys, and Their Monkey Business, Esphyr Slobodkina
The Carrot Seed (La Semilla de Zanahoria), Ruth Knauss
Corduroy (Corduroy, Spanish edition), Don Freeman
Curious George (Curious George, Spanish edition), H. A. Rey
The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash, Trinka H. Noble
Doctor DeSoto (Doctor de Soto, Spanish edition), William Steig
Farmer Duck, Martin Waddell

George and Martha (Jorge y Martha), James Marshall
Good Night, Gorilla, Peggy Rathmann
Grouchy Ladybug (La Mariquita Malhumorada), Eric Carle
Happy Birthday, Moon, Frank Asch
Harold and the Purple Crayon, Crockett Johnson
Harry the Dirty Dog (Harry, el Perrito Sucio), Gene Zion
Here Are My Hands, Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault
Horton Hatches the Egg, Dr. Seuss
I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly, Glen Rounds
If You Give a Mouse a Cookie (Si le Das una Galletita a un Raton), Laura J. Numeroff
Leo, the Late Bloomer (Leo, El Retorno Tardío), Robert Kraus
Where's Spot, Eric Hill

Additional suggestions for predictable books available online at www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/ela/e_literacy/learning.html

Days of the Week Books.

Cookie's Week, Cindy Ward and Tomie de Paola
Today Is Monday, Eric Carle

SPANISH LANGUAGE BOOKS

Animales de La Granja, DK Publishing
Baby Einstein: Poemas Para Pequeñ Ines, Julie Aigner-Clark
Cinco Monitos Brincando en la Cama, Eileen Christelow
Crias y Cachorros, DK Publishing
Donde Me Escondo? (Un Buen Comienzo), Editors of the American Heritage Dictionary
El Mejor Libro de Palabras de Richard Scarry, Richard Scarry
Happy Baby Colores/Colors (Soft to Touch), Priddy Books
La Granja, Jo Litchfield, Pilar Dunster (translator)
Las Nanas de Abuelita, Nelly Palacio Jaramillo
Los Pollitos Dicen: Vamos a Cantar Junto En Ingles y Español!, Ashley Wolff
Me Quieres, Mama BB, Barbara M. Joosse
Mi Libro Pequeno de Palabras, Roger Priddy
Mis Formas, Rebecca Emberley
Mine! A Backpack Baby Story (English/Spanish bilingual), Miriam Cohen
My First Spanish ABC Picture Coloring Book, Deb T. Bunnell
Para, Trencito, Para! Un Cuento de Thomas, Wilbert Vere Awdry
Perritos (Boynton Board Books), Sandra Boynton
Pio Peep! Traditional Spanish Nursery Rhymes, Alma Flor Ada
Rainbow Fish Counting/Numeros, Marcus Pfister
¿Tu mamá es una llama? Is Your Mama a Llama?, Deborah Guarino and Steven Kellogg

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

WEBSITES

Funschool: games.funschool.com
Illinois Early Learning Project:
www.illinoisearlylearning.org
iVillage: parenting.ivillage.com
KidBibs: www.kidbibs.com
KidSource Online: www.kidsource.com
Lil' Fingers: lil-fingers.com
Mrs. Alphabet: www.mrsalphabet.com
Zero to Three: www.zerotothree.org

FIELD TRIP POSSIBILITIES

Public library for story time
Zoo
Museum
Park or forest preserve
Lake, stream, or river
Take a walk
Local nursery

References

- Anno, M. (1977). *Anno's counting book*. Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha.
- Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2003). *A child becomes a reader: Birth through preschool* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/reading_pre.pdf
- Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, M. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309068363/html/>
- Carle, E. (1981). *The very hungry caterpillar*. Philadelphia: Philomel.
- Child Development Institute. (2005). *Language development in children*. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from http://www.cdipage.com/development/language_development.shtml
- Child Literacy Centre. (2000). *Reading to babies, toddlers, and young children: The why? The what? And the how?* Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://childliteracy.com/babies.html>
- Education Oasis. (2005). *Glossary of reading terms*. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/Reading/glossary_reading_terms.htm
- Harris, T. L., & Hodges, R. E. (1995). *The literacy dictionary: The vocabulary of reading and writing*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Martin, B., & Carle, E. (1992). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York: Henry Holt & Co.
- Michigan State Board of Education. (2002). *Early literacy task force report*. Lansing, MI: Author. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_ELTF_Report_37494_7.pdf
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2005). *Accreditation: Information for families*. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation/families.asp>
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Pub. No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.htm>

- Nurss, J. R., & Hodges, W. L. (1982). Early childhood education. In H. E. Mitzel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational research* (5th ed., Vol. 2) (pp. 489–507). New York: The Free Press.
- Parents' Action for Children. (2005). *Developmental milestones: 18–36 months*. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://www.parentsaction.org/learn/parenting/development/developmentalmilestones/>
- Routman, R. (1988). *Transitions: From literature to literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Shelov, S. P., & Hannemann, H. E. (Eds.). (2004). *Caring for your baby and young child: Birth to age 5* (4th ed.). New York: Bantam Books.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://books.nap.edu/books/030906418X/html/index.html>
- Strickland, D. S., & Morrow, L. M. (Eds.). (1989). *Emerging literacy: Young children learn to read and write*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2003). *Reading tips for parents*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://www.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/readingtips/readingtips.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Helping your child become a reader*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/reader.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2005). *My child's academic success: Activities—Helping your child become a reader: As simple as ABC*. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from <http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/part5.html>



1120 East Diehl Road, Suite 200
Naperville, IL 60563-1486
800-252-0283 > 630-649-6500
www.learningpt.org

Naperville > Chicago > Washington, D.C.

982_11/05

Copyright © 2005 Learning Point Associates, sponsored under government contract number ED-01-CO-0011. All rights reserved.

This work was originally produced in whole or in part by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory® (NCREL®) with funds from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education, under contract number ED-01-CO-0011. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of IES or the Department of Education, nor does mention or visual representation of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.

NCREL remains one of the 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education and its work is conducted by Learning Point Associates.

Learning Point Associates, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, and NCREL are trademarks or registered trademarks of Learning Point Associates.