


Early Words



training initiative

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Session Objectives

You will:

- Understand why book reading is important.
- Understand how to choose a good book.
- Understand what kinds of books are appropriate for different ages and reading situations.
- Learn how to conduct a great story time.
- Learn how to get good books for your work setting.
- Learn four activities you can use right away in your programs.

Reflective Activity

- What are your memories of people reading to you or telling stories to you? What did it mean to you? How has that influenced how you read to kids now?
- What was your favorite story or book?
- Did you have adults in your life who were readers? If so, who were they? What kinds of things did they read?
- How did this person's example influence who you are as a reader now?

Why is Book Reading Important?

Exploring books with children plays an important role in language and literacy development.

- Reading to children helps to build their vocabulary and knowledge about the world. Children who know more words and know more about their world have an easier time learning to read. They don't have to figure out what things mean as well as what they say.
- Reading to children helps them become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of reading. We actually sound different when we read, as compared to when we talk with people.
- Books with rhyming words ("Brown Bear, Brown Bear what do you **see**? I see a redbird looking at **me**.") help children learn that words are made up of sounds. Children who know this have an easier time learning that letters also relate to sounds.
- Children love stories and literature when adults read interesting books to them. Children who enjoy reading books with adults are more motivated to learn to read.
- Exploring books helps children learn how books work. Children who know how books work (where is the front and the back, you read the words and not the pictures) have an easier time learning to read.

Reading books teaches children important life lessons.

- Through books, children learn about friendships, relationships, and emotions. Children may identify with the characters in the book.
- Books can help children work through difficult situations (a new sibling, a new house, the death of a pet or loved one). They can comfort them and provide an escape.
- Books teach children about the importance of honesty, kindness, and other qualities.

Reading books with children helps them to build positive relationships with adults.

- Book reading is a special time together, whether one-on-one or in a group.

How To Choose a Book.

In Search Of A Good Book.

- Does it reach out and grab you? Do you want to read this story? Would you want to listen to it? We all have our own preferences. You should not feel that you have to read a specific book to children if you don't like the book (even if others say it is a great book).

- What does it look like? Is the book interesting to look at?
- Does the book reflect the world around you?

Does the book represent people from diverse cultures? Does the book describe activities that the children can relate to? Does the book show both girls and boys to be active and involved in all activities?

- I can't believe it!

Does the book have a believable ending? Some books just fade off or don't resolve the story. A good book ends in a predictable or believable way.

- How will it play with the audience?

Good books are developmentally appropriate; that is they are written and designed for a particular age group. Babies will not "understand" books designed for preschoolers. And preschoolers will be bored by baby books.

Babies.

Books for infants should have simple, clear illustrations. Babies have trouble focusing on abstract pictures. Books for babies should be books that babies can chew on. Look for board books or books made of cloth or non-toxic plastic. Older babies like books with interesting things to touch or move.

Babies initially have no choice but to listen to you. Soon, however, they will try to grab and chew on the book. You can try to distract the child with a teething toy.

At around 8 months of age, babies may be more interested in turning the pages. That's OK. They are learning how a book works. Don't feel like you have to read every word on a page. It may be easier to talk with children about the pictures.

By 12 months, babies start to point out familiar pictures in books, make noises for animals and vehicles, etc. Once babies have learned to walk, it may be hard to keep them reading with you. Don't give up! You may find it easier to start reading a book without children around you and see if you can gather a crowd.

Toddlers.

Books for toddlers should have simple stories with lots of repetition or rhyme.

Toddlers will have trouble sitting still for a book. Try sitting on the floor or in a low chair. Allow the children to gather around you, some standing, some sitting. Start reading with only one child and then see how many others come over to see what's happening.

Toddlers do not tend to have long attention spans for sitting and listening. Choose short stories and stories that relate to the children's lives. Increase the length of your story times slowly. Pay attention to the responses of the children. When the children start to lose interest, move on to another activity.

Preschoolers.

Books for preschoolers should have interesting characters and tell stories.

Preschoolers are ready both for books about pretend worlds and books about the real world (non-fiction). Stories should accurately portray characters (watch out for stereotypes based on gender or ethnic group).

Preschoolers can handle a more complex plot than younger children. You may need to talk about the plot to help them understand what is happening. Ask questions to see how well they understand the story.

Don't Just Stand There. Create A Book!

- Homemade books are easy to create and can be meaningful for children of all ages.

Notes on Choosing and Reading a Book



Take and Use Activity: Make a Book

With younger children (infants and toddlers), make books that reflect their world. You could cut out magazine pictures of people, particularly babies and children. You could take photographs of their environment, family members, etc.

Younger children also like sensory books. You can make a book with pieces of material of different textures (corduroy, velvet, etc.), the bumpy side of corrugated cardboard, some non-toxic sandpaper, or even pieces of textured wallpaper (wall paper stores will often give away their outdated sample books).

With older children, plan with them what they would like in their book. What should their book be about? Have them tell you a story. You can write down their words and then they can draw pictures, cut out magazine pictures, or take photos for the book.

Make books when interesting things are happening or to record recent events. For example, if there was a new building being built in the area, you could take photographs every couple of days and then create a book about building things. Or, if a child expressed an interest in frogs, you could work with the child to collect pictures and information on frogs (from other books, nature centers, the internet, etc.) and then make a book with the collection.

Are You Reading to a Group or to As Many Children As Will Fit on Your Lap?

- Stories read in a group should be shorter. Pictures should be easy to see from a short distance. Books that ask for children's active participation are also good selections for group stories.
- Lap books can often involve more complicated stories, more words to read, or more detailed pictures. With your one-on-one attention, children are able to focus for longer periods of time. Books that cover sensitive topics (divorce, death, etc.) are better when read in laps.

Make Connections With Other Activities.

- Sing songs or finger plays that relate to the book topic.
- Bring props to the story time. For instance, in the story, *The Mitten*, a grandmother knits mittens for her grandson. You could bring pieces of yarn to the story time for the children to explore. Or you could have a knitter demonstrate for the children.
- Offer other activities throughout the day that relate to a book. Related activities can help make the book even more meaningful for children.



Take and Use Activity: Expand A Book

Here are some ideas for expanding a book. There are also resource books that can help you. The Story S-T-R-E-T-C-H-E-R-S series by Shirley C. Raines and Robert J. Canady contains many different activities that relate to popular children's books.

Blueberries for Sal Robert McCloskey

(Little Sal and little bear pick blueberries)

Make blueberry pancakes. If possible, take the children blueberry picking.

And to Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street Dr. Seuss

(A child's adventures on the way home from school)

Plan a walk to a child's favorite spot. Write down what the child predicts he might see: After the walk, write down what you saw and compare the lists and see how many predictions came true.

Do You Want To Be My Friend? Eric Carle

(A small gray mouse searches for a friend)

Play animal sound games as you look at the pictures in this book. Take turns creating and imitating the sounds of jungle animals.

Ideas from Read Aloud Packet by Sally Skelding

Activity Notes

How to Read a Book.

Do's

- Read often with at least one “routine” or expected time each day.
- Set the scene. Choose a good time read when things have been taken care of, the children are settled, fed, and diapers changed. Read books away from distractions — an open window, the hamster cage, and so forth.
- Keep an eye on the scene. Pay attention to the children and how they are reacting to the story. If they seem bored or antsy, you could shorten the story or do a finger play or active song in between books.
- Vary the book length and topics.
- Have fun! If you are having fun, the children will catch the spirit as well.
- Involve the children as much as possible. Ask questions and encourage conversation about the book. When reading one-on-one, have the child turn the pages when it is time.
- Hold the book so that every child can see the pictures clearly.
- If a passage is too long, shorten it or “read” the pictures.
- Read with feeling. Make your voice loud and soft, high and low. If you feel comfortable, create voices for the different characters. Slow your voice, to build suspense.
- Practice before you read, especially with a new book.
- Read favorite books again.
- Introduce new books on a regular basis.

Don'ts

- If you don't like the book, don't read it!
- Don't feel like you have to read the words.
- If a book is not working, don't feel like you have to finish it. Transition into another activity.
- Don't think that just because a book won an award, it is a good book to read aloud. Some books win awards for pictures, but have lousy read aloud stories.
- Don't start to read if you are going to be rushed or don't think you can finish.
- Don't hesitate to answer children's questions.
- Don't use books as threats ("if you don't clean up, there will be no story." "If you don't listen to the story, you won't get to go outside."). Children will quickly change their attitudes about books from positive to negative.

Adapted from *The Read Aloud Handbook*

J. Trelease (1995)



Take and Use Activity: Reading Peter's Chair

Read ~~*Peter's Chair*~~ to your partner the way you would read to a group of children. Try to use some of the suggestions listed in the “do’s and don’ts” section. Your partner will give you some feedback on your story reading.

Read Aloud Issues

Should I read the book straight through or stop and ask questions every couple of pages?

Everyone has his/her own preferred style of reading to children. There is no one “right” style.

It *is* important to talk with children about stories and what happens in stories. You could ask questions before and after you read the book or pause every few pages with questions. Either way, children have a chance to talk about what they are hearing.

I work with children of mixed ages,
how do I run a story time?

Reading to groups of children of varying ages is challenging, but not impossible.

Try to keep your story times informal. Older children will likely stay to hear an entire story, but the toddlers and young preschoolers may wander in and out.

Involve the older children as helpers. Encourage the older children to help the younger children participate. They could act as a “reading buddy” or show the younger how to do hand movements to go with a book, and so forth. Older children can even “read” to younger children when story time is over.

Try to read to individuals or pairs of children at other times during the day. That way, each age group (babies, toddlers, preschoolers) will get something just for them.

Reading Aloud Notes

What if the children don't want to read books?

Most children like to read books with adults and will participate in story times. In general, if you follow the suggestions listed here (with your own variations), you will have many fun story times.

Story times do not always go perfectly. This is also to be expected. When story times fall apart, it is important to ask yourself why so that you can make changes for the next time.

Do you have new children in your group? New children are just learning your routines and may not have experience reading books with adults. For a while, you might want to read shorter stories and keep your story times to one or two books. Remember to build back to where you were gradually.

Is there something distracting the children? A distraction could be an obvious noise, such as a child crying or a gerbil who decided to use the exercise wheel just as you started to read. Or, a distraction could be something else that is influencing the children's behavior, such as the week before Christmas, a bright sunny day after months of rain, or the first day back after an illness or vacation.

You can avoid noise distractions by waiting to begin your story time at a quiet moment. You may have to make some changes to your story time to overcome other distractions. For instance, on a bright sunny day, you might want to save your stories until after the children have a chance to play outside. On the first day back after vacation, you may want to only read familiar, favorite books or action books (books that encourage the children to move around).

If you feel that it would be better to end the story time early, try to transition smoothly into another activity. It is important not to punish children when a story time goes badly. Instead, try to have a few easy transitions ready each time you start to read. For instance, you could move into a favorite finger play or sing a song.

Reading Aloud Notes



Take and Use Activity: Book Transitions

Book transitions help children move in and out of story time easily. They also create more book connections.

Sing a song to call children over to the story or start making noises that are consistent with a character in the story.

If the children arrive at the story wiggly or out of breath, you can do some deep breathing exercises. Take a deep breath, fill your lungs, and then slowly blow the air out. Do this several times. Ask the children to take a deep breath and hold their breath as you all count together silently then slowly blow the air out. Use your fingers to count.

Encourage children to walk like a character in one of the storybooks to or from the story time area. “Can you crawl like a caterpillar to the coat room?” “Can you chug like a train to the lunch table?” “Can you hop like a kangaroo?”

If you find that children are losing interest, find something in the pictures to talk or sing about. You could point to stars and say, “this reminds me of a song” then put the book down and start singing “Twinkle, Twinkle.”

After you sing a song, ask the children to pick another song that they would like to sing.

To excuse children from story time you could refer to the colors that the children are wearing. If you want single children to leave the group, choose unusual colors or patterns. If you want more children to leave at once, choose common colors (black, blue, red, etc.). You can sing the following song to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

Look, look, look around. Look around the room.
I see someone who's wearing (name color or pattern).
You may be excused.

Before you sing, remind children of what they can do when excused
(Choose an activity, sit at the table, go and get a coat, etc.).

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Transition Magician

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Where and How to Get Good Books?

The Multnomah County Libraries

There are libraries all over Multnomah County with lots of good books for children. Information on branches and how to get a library card is located in the pockets of your training folder.

When you get a library card, the library keeps all of your personal information completely confidential. No other person or agency (IRS, INS, etc.) can get your personal information from the library. There is no way that anyone can track you down because of information you gave to the library.

Title Wave

The Library sells used books at very low cost. Title Wave is located at 216 NE Knott, Portland. Its hours are Monday - Saturday 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. TitleWave is closed on Sundays.

The Early Words training initiative

Early Words is offering resources (in the form of books) to providers who complete two training sessions and the in-center training. For more information you can call 503-988-3831

Starting Out Right

Your resource book (pp. 165 – 167) lists Internet resources on books and reading with children.

Closing

There is no frigate [ship] like a book to take us miles away. Emily Dickinson

Grace, a retired librarian, comes weekly to her daughter Josie's family child care home to read and tell stories to a group of four year olds.

Today she reads *The Little Engine that Could* then tells about the traveling she has done by train through high mountains and many miles.

When the story is over, kids begin to ask questions all at once. Grace asks them to raise their hands, so they would each get a turn to talk. She calls on Leslie, who had listened intently, her eyes riveted on Grace all through the story. Leslie asks, "Do you know you have wrinkles?"

Surprised, Grace thinks quickly about how to stay on the topic of trains and travel. "Yes, but they're really adventure lines," she answers.

Then Jackie, sitting next to Leslie, pipes, "Maybe you shouldn't travel so much."

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For the Love of Children: Daily Affirmations for People Who Care for Children

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