

The Importance of Stories and rhymes

No-one really knows how children learn to read but everyone agrees that listening to stories and rhymes is a good beginning.

Children are helped to develop their knowledge of language through stories and rhymes and the earlier this exposure takes place the better.

Early books

From around three months babies can be introduced to board books which contain simple, large colourful pictures. Looking at books with young children should be a frequent activity and it is important, at this stage, to keep sessions short. In this way, books will become a natural part of their world, and will provide opportunities for good adult and child relationships.

Later as children gain in understanding, so they develop a greater interest in simple stories and rhymes.

Nursery rhymes

Nursery rhymes play an important role in developing children's awareness of sounds within words. For this reason it is worthwhile investing in a good nursery rhyme book like: "Hippety Hop Hippety Hay" or "The Mother Goose Treasury".

Simple rhymes like "Pat-a-cake" can start as soon as babies show signs of putting both hands together, and playing finger and toe games like "This little piggy went to market" or "Round and round the garden" are fun, and further help to establish cosy relationships. Frequent reciting of rhymes heightens children's awareness of rhyming words and develops memory skills.

Listening to stories

Listening to stories is the key to further development. In sharing stories with young children, adults are able to establish an atmosphere in which print can be seen, shared, and talked about; story structures can be demonstrated and feelings can be explored.

Stories which contain repetition and rhymes such as "The Three Billy Goats Gruff", "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" and "The Gingerbread Man" are good examples of the more traditional type stories which beg children to join in.

Picture books

Picture books have an important part to play in encouraging further development. They tell stories in words and pictures and nowadays it is easy to tap into a wealth of bright colourful picture books which your child can 'read'. This is best done in children's first language, but as they get older dual-text / books can be introduced to children developing two or more languages. There are many books which will capture a child's interest, and stimulate imagination and a sense of fun.

Telling stories

Telling stories is both simple and complicated, as stories have certain conventions which have to be learned, eg. stories which start with "Once upon a time" end in a particular way. Helping children to tell stories for themselves using known story structures not only helps to develop understanding, but also develops memory skills and good use of language.

Moving on

Why? How? Where? What? The questions that children ask are not easily answered, but exposure to bright exciting books can help. “I am a Frog”, “I am a Rabbit” and “Good Morning Chick” give young children and adults opportunities to explore together the everyday world in story format

A good home library

Building up a good home library for a child is an important feature of language development. It is good to have books which reflect a child’s culture and identity, as well as books that introduce different cultures and backgrounds. A checklist of the types of books which form the core of a basic library is included.

A basic library checklist

- ✎ 5/6 picture books
- ✎ 2 bedtime story collections
- ✎ A nursery rhyme book
- ✎ A finger rhyme book
- ✎ An ABC book
- ✎ A simple counting book
- ✎ A book about animals

Booklist

All books listed in this leaflet are available from most good bookshops and libraries, otherwise addresses are supplied.

Nursery Rhymes chosen by Ronne Randall. Ladybird.

Hippety-Hop Hippety-Hay Opal Dunn

The Mother Goose Treasury illustrated by Raymond Briggs. Hamish Hamilton.

This Little Puffin edited by Elizabeth Matterson. Puffin.

Spot’s First Walk Eric Hill. Heinemann.

Peepo Janet and Allan Ahlberg. Puffin.

Each Peach Pear Plum Janet and Allan Ahlberg. Lions.

Rosie’s Walk Pat Hutchins. Puffin.

Red Fox Elmer David McKee.

I am a Frog and I am a Rabbit Keith Snow and Farelith Eccles Williams. Worlds Work.

Good morning Chick Mina Ginsberg and Bryon Barton. Carousel.