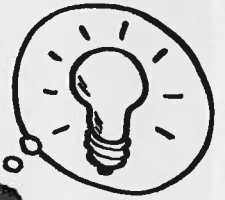


# BUILDING Comprehension Skills



Children need several basic building blocks to understand what they read and become strong readers. They must learn how to recognize words, use picture clues, and read smoothly.

How do young readers gain these skills? With lots and lots of practice. Make time each day to help your child work on his reading skills. Here are ideas for making the experience fun.

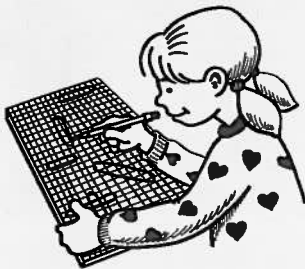
## Recognize the words

The more words your child knows, the faster she can read because she can focus on the meaning rather than sounding out each word. Use these activities to increase your youngster's sight word vocabulary:

✿ Ask your child's teacher for a list of commonly used words (called "sight words") that your youngster should know when she sees them. Slowly spell each word using magnetic letters on the refrigerator. Challenge your child to guess the word before you finish spelling it.

✿ Use a set of Scrabble letter tiles (or homemade ones) to make anagrams (rearranging the letters in one word to spell a new one). *Example:* Spell "but." Ask your youngster to use the same letters to form "tub."

✿ Make a word search for your child. In a 10 x 10 grid on graph paper, write each word (one letter per square) across, down, or diagonally. Fill in the remaining squares with random letters. Have your youngster circle each hidden word and read it aloud.



✿ Turn spelling words into trading cards. Write each one of your child's words on an index

card, and have him draw a picture on the back illustrating the word. For "buy," he might show a person with money in his hand. Then, hold up the word side of the cards, one at a time. If your youngster can read it, give him the card. If not, show him the picture, and ask him to try reading it again.

When he collects the whole set, reward him with a trip to the library.

✿ As your child learns new words, have her print each one on strips of colored paper. Help her make the strips into "links" for a paper chain (tape one strip into a circle, slip the next one through, tape that one's ends, and so on). Suggest that she read all the words in her word chain whenever she adds a new one. Challenge her to make a chain long enough to go around her room.



## Use picture clues

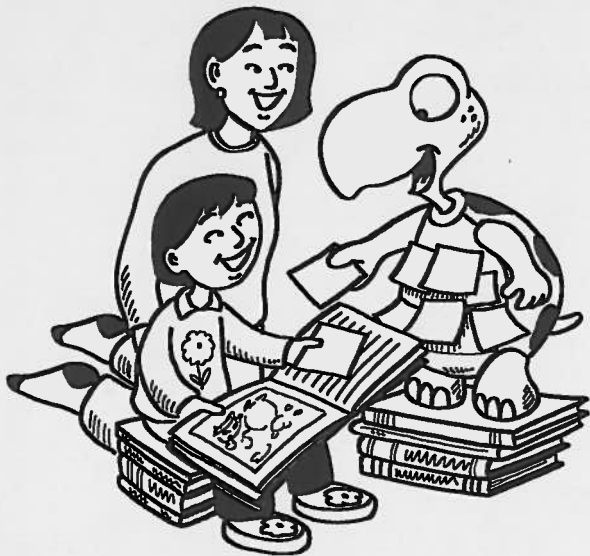
Picture clues help young readers figure out new words.

Encourage your child to look at each picture before he starts to read a page. If he gets stuck while reading, have him look at the illustration again for clues. Try these other tips for teaching your youngster to use picture clues:

✿ Let your child study the front and back covers of a new book. Ask questions that she can answer from what she sees. ("What kinds of animals are in this story?" "Do they look happy or sad?") Then, read the book together and check her predictions.

✿ Give your youngster a handful of coupons with pictures for things you have on hand (cereal, napkins). Have her use the pictures to locate the matching items. Then, help her read the main words on the labels.

✿ Watch a cartoon or short video with the volume turned off. Ask your child to tell you the story by watching what happens.



✿ Use sticky notes to cover the words in a story your child has never read. Ask her to tell you the story that the pictures show. Then, have her take off the sticky notes, read the story to you, and compare the two versions.

✿ Encourage your youngster to make a wordless book. He can draw pictures, cut out pages from coloring books or magazines, or print out computer clip art. Then, have him glue the illustrations onto construction paper. Staple the pages together, and let him “read” his tale to you.

## Read smoothly

Learning to read fluently comes from practice. One way is to read and reread the same books aloud. Here are tricks to keep the reading fun for everyone:

✿ Teach your youngster three-way reading. Choose a nursery rhyme or other poem, and read it three different ways. First, try slow motion. Next, read in a funny voice. Finally, read in a normal voice. Let your child try it all three ways. Ask her to think of a fourth way to read the rhyme.

✿ Try adding instant replays. When your youngster stumbles over a sentence, call “Rewind!” and have him read the sentence again. When he finishes the book, read tongue twisters to him, and let him call “Rewind!” when you mess up.

✿ Suggest a “read-along” to learn about punctuation marks. First, explain that you pause for a comma, stop for a period, raise your voice higher for a question mark, and use an excited tone for an exclamation point. Then, read aloud

and point to the marks as you go. Finally, your child can read along with you, using the punctuation marks.



✿ Write down a section from your youngster’s favorite story, and cut the sentences apart. Give him the first sentence, and have him read it aloud. Ask him to find the sentence that comes next. Let him read both sentences aloud and then look for the next one. Repeat until your child has put the whole story puzzle back together.

## Understand the meaning

Reading comprehension involves more than just understanding individual words. It means being able to understand the meaning behind the words. Give your child a strong vocabulary and strategies for discovering the meaning of what he reads with these activities:

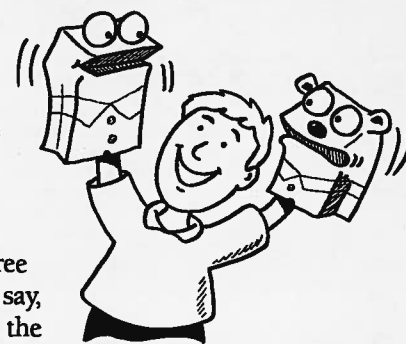
✿ Find ways to expose your youngster to new words by going on a city safari. Make a list of places to visit together (library, museum, animal shelter). Encourage your child to keep a journal of new words she learns during your travels.

✿ Build vocabulary by exploring words in a picture dictionary. For a different approach, investigate books from the Eyewitness series from DK Children. These books provide lots of pictures based on a single theme (castles, weather, farms), with vocabulary to match.

✿ Ask questions as your youngster reads. Instead of yes-or-no questions, try ones that start with “what,” “why,” and “how.” *Examples:* “What does this story remind you of?” “Why do you think she did that?” “How do you think it will end?” Take it a step further, and have your child think of questions to ask you. Sharing ideas this way helps him think about what he is reading.

✿ After finishing a story, suggest that your little one retell it with puppets made from paper bags or socks. Guide her by asking her to show you the beginning, middle, and end. For “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” she might act out the bears leaving the house, Goldilocks exploring the rooms, and the bears scaring Goldilocks away.

✿ Put your child in a main character’s shoes. After reading “The Three Little Pigs,” you could say, “If you were the pig in the brick house, what would you have done?” Your youngster might make a plan for rescuing his brothers from the big bad wolf. Read the story again, and compare his ideas to what happens in the story.



# Sounds Like Fun!

## Vocabulary Games

Most youngsters can't seem to get enough of games! The ones below will help your child improve her vocabulary through thinking, spelling, listening, writing, and reading. Practicing these skills will put her on the road to becoming a successful learner.

### Listen & Find

After reading a story, such as "Little Red Riding Hood," to your child, choose three or four words from the story.

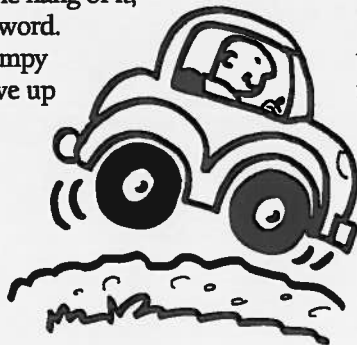
Examples: "red," "wolf," "Grandmother."



Write each word on an index card, and give them to your youngster to hold. Then, spell and read the words aloud. Say, "R-e-d spells red. That's the color of the little girl's cape." Tell her that every time she hears you read "red," she is to show you the card with that word. See if your child can also point to the word in the story.

### Change-a-Word

First, write a simple sentence for your youngster ("I played a quiet game"). Ask him to change one of the words to write a sentence with a different meaning, such as "I played a noisy game." When your youngster gets the hang of it, see if he can change more than one word. For example, "We drove down a bumpy road" could be changed to "We drove up a smooth road."



### Awesome Adjectives

Ask your child to point out an object. Then, put on your thinking caps and take turns coming up with adjectives—words that describe the object. See how many describing words the two of you can string together. Example: A ball might be described as a big ball; a big round ball; a big round red ball; a big round red bouncing ball; or a big round red bouncing beach ball.

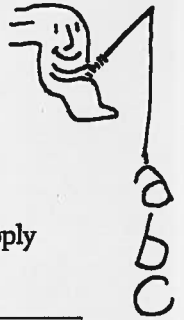


### Breakfast Reading

What do reading and breakfast have in common? Answer: cereal boxes. Ask your child to find these things on a cereal box:

- the first letter in her name
- a word that rhymes with \_\_\_\_\_ (you supply a word)
- a word that begins or ends like the word \_\_\_\_\_
- a word that means the opposite of \_\_\_\_\_

Variation: Write a few words on paper, and see if your youngster can find them on the cereal box.



### Spell It!

As you spend time waiting in line or riding in a car, look around for signs with words on them, such as billboards, store displays, or traffic signs. Take turns using the letters in the words you find to form new words. See how many words you and your youngster can come up with. Example: With a stop sign, you can make the words "spot," "pot," "to," "so," "top," and "sop."

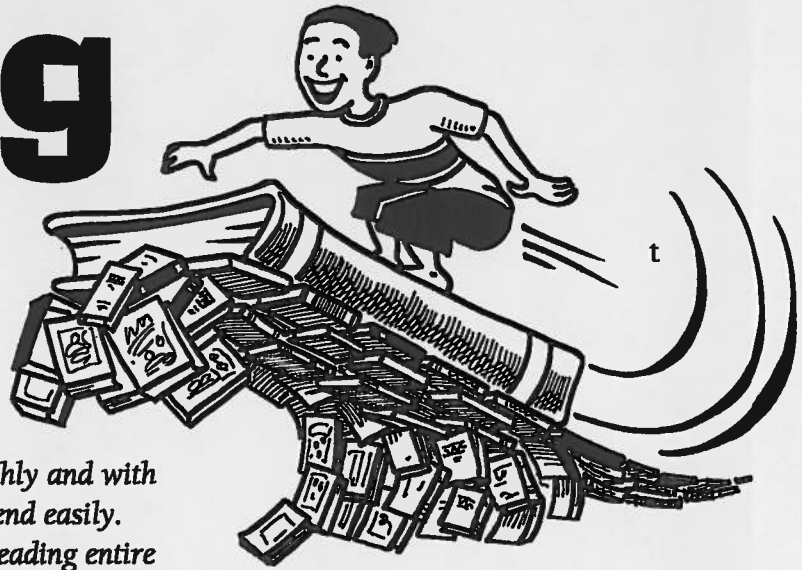
For older children, see who can make up the longest word by using the letters more than once.

### Categories for All

Start by choosing a category for your child. Give him 30 seconds to think of words that fit in the category. If you say, "things that you can eat," your youngster could say, "ice cream," "pizza," and "apple." Other categories could include "things that melt" (ice, candle, chocolate) and "things that are larger than a house" (skyscraper, dinosaur, giant).



# Reading with Ease



Children who read word by word often don't understand what they're reading. They miss the meaning of the story as they focus on each individual word. Fluent readers read whole sentences smoothly and with expression. They recognize words quickly and comprehend easily.

How does a reader go from learning single words to reading entire stories with ease? Through practice and repetition. Try the following suggestions to improve your youngster's reading fluency and comprehension.

## Listen to books on tape

Enhance your child's reading fluency by giving her books on tape. Audiobooks, as they're also called, are available at libraries or bookstores. Often the book is included with the CD or cassette of the story being read aloud. Encourage your youngster to read along in the book while listening to the recording. She'll hear examples of smooth, effortless reading that she can imitate when she reads aloud.



## Learn sight words

Fluent readers recognize and read sight words, such as "a," "you," "they," "have," and "because," without sounding them out. A good way to practice

sight words is to point them out in the books your child reads. For example, ask him to count how many times he can find the word "saw." Which word is used more frequently in his book—"and" or "the"? Ask your child's teacher for a list of sight words, or go online to [www.createdbyteachers.com/sightfree/main.html](http://www.createdbyteachers.com/sightfree/main.html).

## Add excitement to reading

Help your youngster hear the difference between an exciting reading voice and a boring one. Read a paragraph or a page aloud in a monotone voice. Then, read it with expression by changing the tone and volume of your voice. For instance, speak in a low, growly voice if the character is a bear, or in a high-pitched voice for a bird. Ask your child to tell you which way sounds better and why. Have her try reading both ways. Which method does she think makes reading more enjoyable?

## Practice with poetry

Choose a favorite poem, and copy it onto a sheet of paper. Cut the paper into strips—one for each line. Read the poem together line by line, using the

strips. Reading each strip as a phrase instead of reading each word separately helps your child read more fluently.



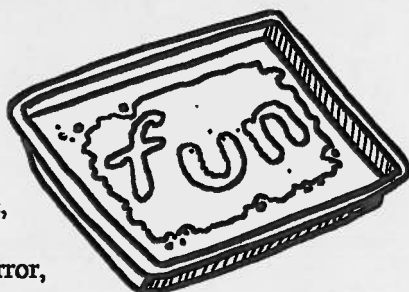
## Attend a book reading

Give your youngster opportunities to hear a variety of experienced readers by taking him to book readings at libraries or bookstores. Or have your own story time at home. Let your child sit in a chair, facing the audience (you, his siblings, or even his favorite stuffed animals). To improve his comprehension, encourage him to pay attention to the punctuation in each sentence. For example, he should pause at each period and raise his voice at the end of the sentence for a question mark.



## Build vocabulary

As your youngster comes across new words while reading, have her write the words in interesting ways. For example, she could write them with her finger on a steamy bathroom mirror, in sugar or flour on a cookie sheet, or in washable glue on a piece of paper (sprinkle glitter over the glue, and shake off the excess once the glue dries). Using her sense of touch will help your child remember the words more easily.



## Try choral reading

Reading aloud together can improve your child's reading fluency. Choose a book that is slightly more difficult than what your youngster is used to reading. If he stumbles on a word, help him figure it out. Then, encourage him to concentrate on reading smoothly as you reread the sentence together.

## Perform a "play"

To practice expressive reading, pick a book with lots of dialogue. *Example:* a book in Arnold Lobel's Frog and Toad series. Each of you choose a character. Tell your child to pretend she is an actress in a play, reading her character's lines with a great deal of expression. Take turns being the narrator and reading the non-dialogue parts of the story.

## Predictable books

Predictable books are ones that repeat the same phrase over and over. These books encourage fluency—and children love reading them. An example of a repeating phrase is "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?" which appears on each page of Bill Martin Jr.'s book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*

Seeing the same words many times helps your child recognize them. As he learns the words, he will no longer have to sound them out each time, and he will be able to focus more on the meaning of the story. Even beginning readers can learn to read smoothly by memorizing repeating phrases.

Here are several books to try with your youngster:

*Are You My Mother?* by P. D. Eastman

*Chicken Soup with Rice: A Book of Months* by Maurice Sendak

*The Gingerbread Boy* by Paul Galdone

*Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown

*If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Numeroff

*It Looked Like Spilt Milk* by Charles Shaw

*The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything* by Linda Williams

*The Napping House* by Audrey Wood

*Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?* by Bill Martin Jr.

*The Teeny Tiny Woman* by Barbara Seuling

*The Three Little Pigs* by Patricia Seibert

*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle



### Editor's Note:

While doing these activities, choose books that are appropriate for your child's reading level. If she knows every word in a book without hesitation, the book is probably too easy. On the other hand, books that are too hard may make her want to give up, and she won't be able to focus on understanding the story. If a book is just right, your youngster will be able to read most of the words fairly easily, and it will have just a few tricky words to keep her challenged.

# The Write Stuff



Why is it important to encourage children to write? Writing allows youngsters to explore their creativity and share events, ideas, and thoughts with others. Writing also develops reading skills—along with self-confidence.

You can bring out the writer in your child with these simple low- or no-cost activities that will make writing practice fun!

## Time Travel Journal

Take off on a writing adventure with your young traveler.

**Materials:** paper, pencil

Ask your child to pretend she has been given a ticket to travel in time. Will she travel back to the pioneer days of the 1800s? Or forward to the year 3000? To use her ticket, she'll need to describe her adventures.

Have your youngster write a journal entry about her trip. She can describe the clothing she wore, what she ate, or an exciting event. *Example:* "March 15, 3000—Today I rode a spaceship to the moon. When I got there, hundreds of people were waiting to see me!"

## Mouthwatering Menus

Your child can practice creative writing with this scrumptious family menu.

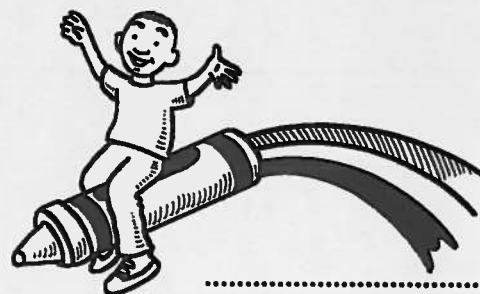
**Materials:** cookbooks, magazines, paper, pencil, crayons or markers

Help your youngster create a menu for your family's "restaurant." Start by looking through cookbooks and magazines for tasty



dishes. Have him choose foods your family might like for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Fold one or two pieces of paper in half. Let your child decorate the outside. On the inside, have him write tempting descriptions of the menu items. *Example:* "These golden pancakes are so fluffy, they might float up to the ceiling."



## Rainbow Writing

Help your youngster make writing a colorful experience.

**Materials:** crayons, two sheets of paper, paper clips, ballpoint pen

Have your child use crayons to heavily color a blank sheet of paper. (*Hint:* Use several different colors.) Place the crayoned side of the paper on top of a blank sheet of paper. Use paper clips to hold the two sheets together.

Let your youngster write anything she'd like on the clean side of the crayon paper. *Ideas:* spelling words, the alphabet, a short story. Tell her to press firmly with a ballpoint pen. When she's finished, separate the sheets. The blank sheet will be covered with her writing—in rainbow colors!



## It's Story Time

With this game, story writing is in the bag!

**Materials:** small plastic or paper bags, magazines, scissors, pencils, paper

Give each player a bag. Then, ask them to cut five pictures of people, places, and things from magazines.

Have each person write a short story using as many of the pictures as possible. *Example:* "The COW ran across the FIELD. The FARMER tried to stop the cow, but his TRACTOR got stuck in the mud!" Suggest they make up different styles of stories—funny, scary, or adventurous.

*Hint:* Younger children can tell their stories instead of writing them.

Give one point for every picture used. The player who uses the most pictures to tell a story wins. Then, trade bags, and play another round.

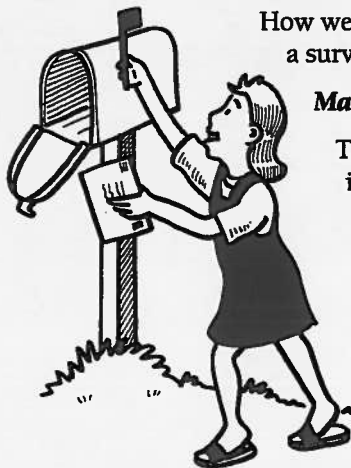
## Letters, Letters—Everywhere!

Here are three letter-writing activities for your child to try.

**Materials:** paper, pencil, envelopes, stamps

1. Does your youngster ever ask you questions, such as how the mail is delivered or how bagels are made? Suggest that she write a letter to the post office or bakery and ask for a tour.

2. Help your child write to a favorite author, sports figure, community leader, or teacher. In the letter, he can explain how the person has influenced him. And it gives him a chance to say thanks to someone special.

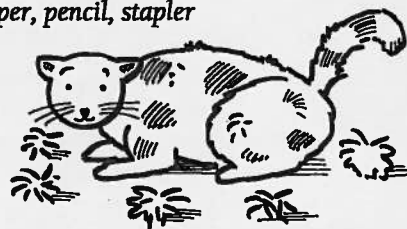


3. Have your youngster send a question to a friend or relative. *Example:* "How will you spend your summer vacation?" At the bottom of the note, add the names and addresses of several other friends. Then, add your child's address to the end of the list. Ask the recipient to write his answer on the note and send it to the next person on the list.

## What Should I Do?

Almost everyone likes to give advice. With this activity, your youngster can create her own advice column.

**Materials:** paper, pencil, stapler



Think of several problems for your child to solve. Have each one end with the question, "What should I do?" *Example:* "My cat is shedding. What should I do?" Ask your youngster to write down the answers on sheets of paper. Encourage funny responses, such as "You could gather the fur and make a pillow!"

Collect the papers, and staple them together into a book. Then, when you need a laugh, read a few of the questions aloud together.

*Variation:* Younger children can answer the questions aloud, and you can write down their answers.

## Super Survey

How well does your child know her family? She can take a survey to find out!

**Materials:** paper, pencil

Together, make a list of questions. *Examples:* "What is your favorite food?" "Which animal is the perfect pet?" Help a young child make a list of yes-or-no questions, such as "Do you like french fries?"

Help her set up a "survey booth" at the kitchen table. Invite each family member to the booth to answer the survey. Your youngster can write their answers under each question. After everyone has answered, let them guess each person's likes and dislikes—the results might surprise them!

# Read Aloud!

It's a gift every parent can give: reading aloud to a child before he can read on his own. And once a youngster can read alone, continuing to read aloud can build his vocabulary and keep him excited about books.

Here are ideas for helping your child get the most from story time. We've also included titles that are especially good for reading out loud.

## Three parts of reading aloud

From choosing a book to talking about what you've read, you can fit learning and fun into every minute of story time.

**1. Before.** Let your youngster pick a story, even if she always reaches for the same one. Familiar stories are comforting, and she'll recognize more words each time she hears a story. To introduce her to new titles, you can choose the next story.



Read the title and author before you open a book. Look at the cover picture, and predict what the story might be about. ("This is *Corduroy*, by Don Freeman. Look—that bear is missing a button. I wonder what happened to it.")

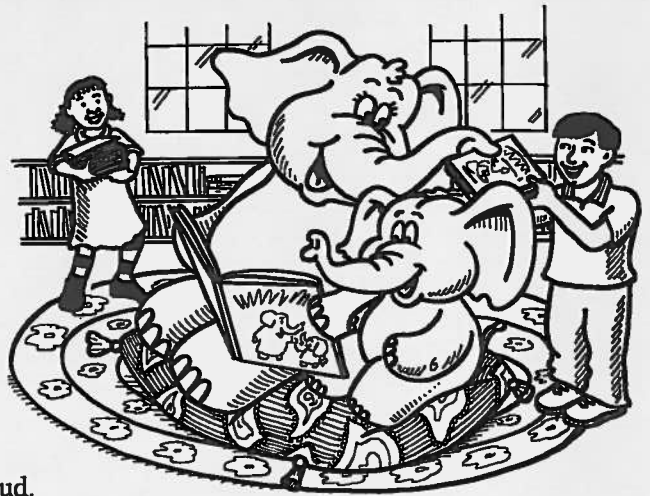
**2. During.** Allow your child to set the tone. She may want to point out rhyming words, ask questions, tell you something the story reminds her of, or turn

back to an earlier page to look at a picture again. This lets her participate in reading aloud.

You can draw her attention to pictures of objects by pointing out things mentioned in the story: "See—he thinks that's his button on the bed." Talking about a book builds comprehension and makes reading aloud more fun. *Tip:* Relax while you're reading. Laugh and let your child see how much you enjoy books.

**3. After.** Have your youngster show you her favorite page and explain why she likes it. Compare the book with another story you have read to help her make connections between books. ("*Corduroy* reminds me of *Home for a Bunny* because they both have a character that needs a home.") Ask your child questions about the characters' feelings so she can learn to read between the lines. ("How do you think *Corduroy* felt when the girl came back?")

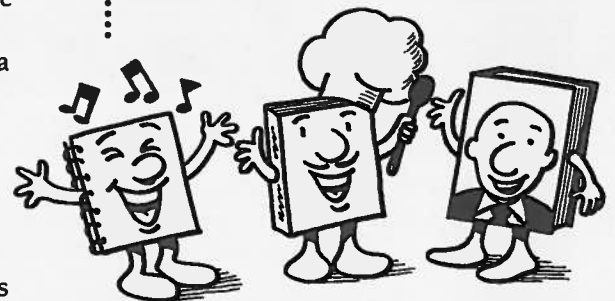
You might also help her start a read-aloud journal. Your youngster can draw a picture of her favorite part, write words describing how it made her feel, or write sentences telling the plot. She'll pay closer attention as you read when she knows she'll be drawing and writing in her journal.



## Books and more

Use read-aloud time to introduce your child to a wide variety of book types. For example, he can learn about a person, a place, or an animal when you read biographies or nonfiction books. Or read a choose-your-own-adventure story and take turns picking paths for the characters to follow.

Think outside the book, too. Ask your child to read a recipe as you cook or to read directions for playing a board game or putting a toy together. Poems, song lyrics, and plays are fun to read out loud and are great for showing expression. You can also read stories that your youngster has written!



continued



## Read everywhere

Experts recommend that you read to your youngster for at least 20 minutes each day. Many parents do this at bedtime, but you can also surprise your child with books at unexpected times and places.

For example, pack books and a picnic lunch, and head to a park or out to the backyard. On a hike, take a break to read a chapter while sitting under a tree together. Carry along a magazine to the swimming pool and read articles or jokes aloud. If you're going out to eat, tuck a book into your bag and pull it out while you wait for your food. Reading aloud is also a good way to pass time on an airplane, a bus, or a train.

## Sharing read-alouds

Build a bridge to independent reading by asking your youngster to help you read. You might have her read the words along with you, or you can take turns reading every other page. Try passing a story around the table and having each family member read one page.

It's also fun to read with a friend. Suggest that your child invite a friend to bring a book over. They can read aloud



to each other. Or they might arrange to meet at the library, where they can select books to share.

## Guest readers

Hearing other adults read aloud exposes your child to various reading styles and many new books. Attend story hours at libraries and bookstores. Leave books for babysitters and ask them to read to your youngster. See if relatives will call your child for long-distance read-alouds.

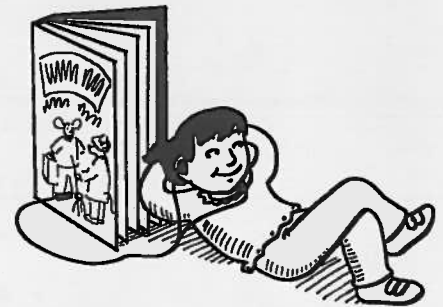
You can be a guest reader, too. Ask your youngster's teacher if you can read to the whole class, a small group, or individual children. In addition to helping out the teacher, you'll help your youngster make the connection between reading at school and reading at home.

## Recorded books

Any time is story time with a book on tape, a CD, or an MP3 player. By listening to a recording and following along in a book, your youngster will learn to read new words and practice reading at a good pace.

You can borrow audiobooks from the library or find low-cost options in book club catalogs sent home from school. Or download audiobooks from an online bookstore.

Another great option is to record yourself reading your child's favorite books—she will love hearing your voice! Use a tape recorder, or put a recordable CD in your computer and read a story aloud into the microphone. Label the recordings, and store them with your youngster's book collection.



## Book Picks

### Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type

If cows could communicate, what would they ask for? The ones in Doreen Cronin's story can type, and



they leave Farmer Brown a note requesting electric blankets. When he doesn't bring any, they go on strike! (Available in Spanish.)

**Koala Lou** Everyone loves adorable Koala Lou, especially her mother. But when her siblings are born, she's no longer the center of attention. Of course, the little koala soon discovers she's loved, no matter what. A sweet story by Mem Fox.

**A Seed Is Sleepy** This nonfiction book explains how seeds turn into plants. Dianna Hutts Aston uses science vocabulary in simple rhymes that encourage children to listen. The illustrations identify seeds, and charts show the steps they go through to become plants.

**Honey, I Love** Eloise Greenfield's poems are about things the little girl narrator loves, like riding down a

country road with her family or jumping into a swimming pool. A lively look at family life.

**Humphrey the Lost Whale** This true story by Wendy Tokuda and Richard Hall tells of a humpback whale that accidentally ended up in the Sacramento River. Humphrey was lost for nearly a month before he was rescued and led back to the Pacific Ocean.

**The Teddy Bears' Picnic** In Jimmy Kennedy's picture-book version of this classic song, teddy bears plan a special picnic in the woods. There are games, balloons—and honey. The story's rhythm and repeated lines make it a nice read-aloud.