

Choosing Books for Young Children

by Alka Burman

Children often learn about the world and their place in it through books. Books can be an important way for children to share their feelings, concerns and emotions; to learn new concepts or reinforce concepts they already know; and to expand their horizons and have new experiences. Children who enjoy engaging with books at a young age are also more likely to continue to read as they get older. When we choose books for children we often consider the story, the illustrations, the message, the rhythm and the impact that we think the story will have on the child.

HELPING CHILDREN CHOOSE BOOKS

Learning to make choices is an important skill for children, and learning to make choices about books is especially critical. Allowing children to choose their own books lets them have control over the literature that they are engaged with. Children who choose their books will read more and will be motivated to continue to read as they get older. And if they read more, evidence indicates that their reading fluency and vocabulary will increase.

Picture Books

Picture books are usually for children 4 to 8 years old, and have simple plots with lots of illustrations that help to explain the text. They offer a wide variety of styles, themes and viewpoints. The stories vary in complexity and can be available in paper or board book format.

Baby and Toddler Books

Books in this genre can be wordless or can have simple stories. They can also take the form of lullabies, nursery rhymes or finger plays. The illustrations form a very important part of the book with the length of the text varying depending on the age of the child. Some really effective baby and toddler

books have photographs and are related to everyday routines in a child's life.

Information Books

These books are designed to be factual and can relate to a particular theme. Some children prefer information text, so it is important to have these available on your bookshelf. Information books are non-fiction, and are instrumental in developing new vocabulary.

Poetry and Rhyme Books

Children benefit from these types of books at any age, and having poetry or books with rhymes will strengthen their phonological awareness and help children to make connections between words and the sounds that letters make. These books allow children a wonderful opportunity to play with words and to have fun with language.

Dual-language Books

These books have text in both the home language and in English. They provide an effective way for parents to continue to interact with their child in their home language while having the resources available to support English language learning.



WHAT DO CHILDREN LEARN FROM BOOKS?

According to *Every Child Ready to Read @ your library* (a toolkit published by the American Library Association) there are six key skills that children learn from engaging in books.

Vocabulary: knowing the names of things. This can be reinforced by reading picture books every day. Suggested titles include: *The Napping House* by Don and Audrey Wood; *Dim Sum for Everyone!* by Grace Lin; and *Red, Blue, Yellow Shoe* by Tana Hoban. Wordless books can also be used with children as parents point out and name the objects or activities shown in the pictures. Parents can also use dual-language books for vocabulary development.

Print Motivation: a child's interest and enjoyment of books. This can be reinforced by providing a variety of different types of books. Suggested titles include: *Subway Mouse* by Barbara Reid; *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle which is also available in dual-language; and *Wide Mouthed Frog* by Keith Faulkner.

Narrative Skills: the ability to describe things and events and to tell stories. This can be reinforced by reading favourite books again and again. Suggested titles include: *One Hot Summer Day* by Nina Crews; *Something from Nothing* by Phoebe Gilman; and *I Went Walking* by Sue Williams. Wordless books and dual-language books can also be used to help devel-

op narrative skills.

Phonological Awareness: the ability to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words. This can be reinforced by reading books with rhyming text. Suggested titles include: *Brown Bear Brown Bear* by Bill Martin Jr.; *Hush: A Thai Lullaby* by Minfong Ho; and *Time for Bed* by Mem Fox. Parents should seek out dual-language books so they can interact in their home language or use wordless books and make up their own stories.

Print Awareness: noticing print, knowing how to handle a book and how to follow the written word on a page. This can be reinforced by pointing to the words in the book as you read the story. Suggested titles include: *What! Cried Granny* by Kate Lum; *It's Mine!* by Rod Campbell; *Oh, Look!* by Patricia Polacco; and *Snowballs* by Lois Ehlert. Parents can also use dual language books pointing out print in their home language and print in English.

Letter Knowledge: learning the sounds of letters, the names of letters and how to recognize them everywhere. This can be reinforced by having children read simple text back to you. Suggested titles include: *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin Jr.; *Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert; and *A Big City ABC* by Allan Moak. Parents can also use dual-language books or add stories to their photo albums at home to support this skill.



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