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King Street
Cooperative
Preschool

How Can I Help My Child to Be a Bookworm?

By Teacher Aaron

I love reading. I love to read the newspaper, the signs on the sides of buses, scary thriller novels, funny autobiographies, historical fiction, or even the nutrition facts on the label just because the words are there! In fact, I remember growing up and seeing my mother and father reading. Sometimes I would say, "Can we play outside, please?!" and my mom would simply turn to me and say "Not now dear, I'm reading. But I will play outside with you when I am done."

Looking back, those words were so important for me because I knew that my mom valued reading for pleasure. Now, as an educator, I think about how children can learn how to read for pleasure. How do children develop a love for reading?

Reading involves two major processes: comprehending (what words mean) and decoding (recognizing and sounding out words). Children begin these processes far before Kindergarten. We call this phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. Phonological awareness is a rather broad term that also includes the more familiar term phonemic awareness. When a person has phonological awareness, he or she can recognize the sound structure of speech, or in other words, the ability to perceive word sounds and to pronounce parts of words. Even infants do this! They are starting this when they babble. You sit with your baby in your lap and you say "bah, bah, baaaah" or "zu, zu, zu." At ages 3 and 4, children can already hear rhymes like small, ball, tall and also alliterations like fast, free, foam, flick. Practicing these skills helps them to break down words. Later, at ages 5 and 6, they can break down words into syllables, identify sounds of words, and even hear different sounds in the middle of words too. In preschool, we play with words all the time. Maybe we will be reading a book by Dr. Seuss and make up as many rhymes as we can to the word lorax or schloot. We'll sing songs that rhyme and separate the rhyming words. We also say rhymes during circle time or on the way to outside.

The more you read,
the more things you will know.
The more that you learn,
the more places you'll go.

- Dr. Seuss

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Here's a rhyming finger play as an example:

*Two little black birds sitting on the hill (hold up both index fingers)
One named Jack and the other named Jill (wiggle one, wiggle the other)
Fly away Jack, fly away Jill (put one hand behind your back then the other)
Come back Jack, Come back Jill (bring back one hand, then the other)*

We'll even ask children what else the blackbirds are sitting on. Maybe they're sitting on a pot and one is named Jack and the other is named Snot! Children love being silly with rhymes and it helps them enjoy reading when it can be silly. That way when they come to a book, they remember the rhyming words they sang about earlier.



Alphabet knowledge is also really important for little readers. Young children are engaged in representing familiar objects and actions in a variety of ways, including writing. After all, reading and writing go together, we don't learn them separately. Children easily love writing as much as reading. They see us write! They examine texts on signs, in books, on the way to school, at the park, everywhere! They are learning how to recognize and name familiar letters, especially those in their own name.

"The word 'stop' as a 'T' in it, just like my name!"

By experimenting with these letters, they start to write actual letters of words that are significant to them. Even if you feel like you can't bare another read through of *Goodnight Moon* for the 5th time that night, just remember that your child is developing a love for reading by bonding with you in your arms as you read together. Explore letters by using alphabet puzzles, magnetic letters, alphabet games, blocks, stamps, stencils, and charts. We want them to play with these manipulatives and have fun with them. Play Alphabet Yoga together and go through some of their favorite letters by



posing as the letter with your whole body!

Finally, when you read with your child, open up a dialogue throughout the book. This is called Dialogic Reading. Research has shown that the way we read with children is just as important as how frequently we read with them. When a child is an active participant in the story, they retain it better. They also show greater gain in vocabulary than when you simply read the book straight through. So when you read, have a conversation about the story. Let them talk and don't interrupt them, even if it's hard. Children can take a while to process information before they speak it out loud. In your head, after you ask a question, count three alligators.

There are many ways to engage a child in dialogic reading. The first thing to remember is to ask them questions, and evaluate what they say. Then expand on their response and repeat what they say. For example, maybe you're reading *Where the Wild Things Are*. You might turn to a page and ask "why do you think Max is upset?" They might say "because he had to go to his room without his supper." Then you might expand on this by saying "wow! I can understand how he feels. Would you feel upset too if that happened to you?" If a child knows a book really well, leave parts of it blank. Let them finish the sentences. This works especially well for books that rhyme. You can also recall parts of the book. "Wait, why is Max upset?"

Last, be sure to ask your child open-ended questions such as "tell me what's going on in this picture." Open-ended questions help children increase expressive language and attention to detail. Children also love to relate the story to their own lives. "Wow, I have a monster suit just like Max!"

These strategies are a few that will help your child be a little bookworm. Helping children to develop a love and appreciation for reading now will go a long way. And don't forget to have them see you read too! After all, when children know that you love reading, they will too.