



Learning to read begins before children start school. Help children develop early literacy skills now; this makes it easier for children to learn to read once they begin school.

Five of the best ways to help children get ready to read are:



Learn how to help children get ready to read with simple activities such as the ones suggested here.

Find more ideas at your library.

Getting Ready to Read

Places to Talk

Talking and conversation with children is one of the best ways to help develop language and other early literacy skills. Serve and return conversations help a child express thoughts, learn what words mean, and gain new information about the world. Any place is a good place to talk with children. All you need is to take the time and spend a few minutes one-on-one. Listen to what children say, answer questions, add new information, and listen some more! Ten chances to chat during the day include:

Welcome time	During Transitions
Clean-up time	Snack time
Waiting in a line	Hand Washing time
Before a nap	During playtime
During meals	Out on a walk

Places to Sing

Singing helps children hear the distinct sounds that make up words. This is an important early literacy skill. Songs also teach new vocabulary and introduce new ideas and concepts.

Sing with children any chance you have: cleaning up, waiting in line, during a walk, during lunch. You don't need a perfect voice, just some enthusiasm. Play music throughout your day. Check out music CDs from the library or listen to family-friendly music online from sites such as www.freesongsforkids.com or www.speakaboos.com/songs.

Move to the music. Children develop motor skills as they clap, jump, twirl, and spin to music. Make simple musical instruments and play them as you sing. Fill a plastic bottle with cereal or use a pie-tin and wooden spoon as percussion instruments. Need more ideas for what to make? Find help at the library.

You also can sing nursery rhymes, or sing instead of reading a book. Find a book that is based on a song (ask your librarian for help) or make up a simple tune for one of your classroom's favorite books.

Places to Read

Shared reading—or reading books together—is the single best way to help children develop early literacy skills. Read together as a group every day and talk about the books you read. When you have the opportunity, read one-on-one with a child.

Create a special space in the classroom for children to look at books. Provide a comfortable chair or pillows and a small shelf or basket for favorite books. Make sure there's room for you and children to sit together and that children can reach books without needing help. Encourage children to pretend to read a book to a favorite stuffed animal.

Have a special spot for library books, and teach children to handle them gently. Keep a list of favorite books to check out and the names of authors you especially enjoy. Write down questions children ask. On your next visit to the library, look for books related to children's interests.

Show children that reading is important by talking about books or authors that you read and enjoy.

Places to Write

Reading and writing go together. Writing activities help children learn letter names and sound out new words. Writing also helps children understand that written words represent ideas, places, and events.

Make it easy for children in your classroom to write throughout the day. Set up a space where a child can go on his or her own and use writing materials. Provide pencils, crayons, or markers of different sizes so children can write with what is most comfortable. Use unlined paper. When a child is ready to write letters, begin with uppercase letters. Try writing favorite words first, such as a child's name or "Mom" and "Dad."

Show examples of your writing: lists, notes, instructions, etc. Write your class a note and leave it in the writing area. Display children's writing for parents to see. Save what children write in a box or basket.

Places to Play

Children learn how to express themselves, the meaning of words, and other early literacy skills by playing. Play requires a little space, simple props, and some imagination and encouragement. Provide inexpensive props like large boxes, old clothes or costumes for dress up, empty food containers, paper shopping bags, and empty paper towel rolls. Make sock puppets; create a puppet stage using a sheet draped over two chairs and act out a favorite story. Play with art materials, or with outdoor inspirations.

Encourage children to create stories by imagining he or she is in another place or pretending to be someone else. Play comes naturally to young children and is one of the primary ways they learn. Provide purposeful opportunities for children to play, and you can help them develop their ideas by providing props and materials, making suggestions and asking a few open-ended questions from the sidelines.



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Milestones in Learning the Alphabet

Milestones for preschool children

Learn to sing the alphabet song
Understand that letters have shapes
Understand that each letter has a name
Learn the names of the letters used in their name
Begin to write some of the letters in their names.

Milestones for kindergartners

Learn all the letters of the alphabet
Match uppercase and lowercase forms
Identify every letter in different cases and styles.
Learn to write their first and last name.
Begin to learn the common sounds that each letter represents, beginning with the consonants.

Milestones for first graders

Know all the letter names and sounds; identify them quickly and fluently. Master all letter-sound matches.
Learn how to form all letters correctly.
Write with unconventional spelling.

Milestones for second graders

Learn how to arrange words in alphabetical order.
Begin to master cursive letter formation so that handwriting is automatic and fast.
Begin to spell conventionally. Decode unfamiliar words quickly.



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Fun with Words: Telling Stories

Telling stories is a wonderful way to increase children's vocabulary. As you tell a story, use new words and explain what they mean, or talk about something children haven't experienced and explain what happens.

Here are some storytelling tips. Remember that almost any story you tell children will be of interest—just because you are the one telling it!

Storytelling Starters

For infants and toddlers, start with silly sounds. Children delight in mimicking the sounds you make. This is just the beginning of having conversations with your child.

Tell children about experiences that were important to you.

Tell a story about childhood. Children have a great interest in hearing about experiences that adults had at a similar age.

Use simple props, such as a puppet or a stuffed animal, to tell a story. Use silly voices for different characters and ask your child to join in.

Use wordless books or photos to tell different stories.

Make a book by clipping photos from magazines. Use them to tell an imaginary tale.

Encourage children to tell a story about a favorite event, or act it out.

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Fun Writing Letters and Words

Scribble, Scribble

Help children experiment with writing using pencils, crayons, markers, and chalk on different kinds of paper and cardboard. Encourage your students to make scribbles like the strokes that form letters: straight lines, curves, and circles. Suggest drawing a story. This can be as simple as three pictures: one for the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story. Have children dictate the story to you and create captions for the pictures.

Name Games

Find as many ways as you can think of to play with the sounds and letters of children's name. Help children find the letters of his or her name in print around the classroom or in books. Help children write letters and repeat the sounds they make.

Write It Down

Help children understand that written words stand for spoken words and that writing has a purpose. Use a chalkboard or magnetic letters to write classroom messages. Create a menu for a pretend restaurant and ask children to write or draw what they would like to eat. Ask children to make lists of things they see outside, or what they observe in an experiment.

Jack Be Nimble

Many activities that young children enjoy are terrific for developing the fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination, which they need for writing. Encourage children to cut paper with child-friendly scissors, manipulate art materials, place beads on a string, build with manipulatives, and do simple jigsaw puzzles.

Punch a basic design—a letter, a boat, a flower—in a piece of cardboard. Children can lace a shoelace or string through the holes in the design. Even pinching spring-loaded clothespins can help build the muscles children will use for writing.

Reading to Help Every Child Get Ready to Read

Books With Rich Language

An Alphabet of Dinosaurs written by Peter Dodson; illustrated by Wayne D. Barlowe. Scholastic, 1995. This beautifully illustrated book features twenty-six dinosaurs, one for every letter of the alphabet. Illustrations are accompanied by facts about these monsters of the Mesozoic.

Big Plans written by Bob Shea; illustrated by Lane Smith. Hyperion, 2008. Delightful illustrations accompany this amusing tale of a little boy and his plan for world domination, though right now he is stuck in a time-out corner.

Bubble Trouble written by Margaret Mahy; illustrated by Polly Dunbar. Clarion Books, 2009. Baby is trapped in a bubble blown by older sister Mabel and floats across the neighborhood. Everybody comes together to form a human ladder to rescue the baby.

Buying, Training, and Caring for Your Dinosaur written by Laura Joy Rennert; illustrated by Marc Brown. Knopf, 2009. Exuberant illustrations accompany this humorous guide to selecting and caring for pet dinosaurs.

Chrysanthemum written and illustrated by Kevin Henkes. Greenwillow Books, 1991. Chrysanthemum used to love her name, but became weary of it when she started school and her name became a joke amongst her classmates. With the support of her family, and a surprise from a teacher, Chrysanthemum and her classmates learn to love and accept her special name.

First to Fly: How Wilbur and Orville Wright Invented the Airplane written by Peter Busby; illustrated by David Craig. Crown, 2002. Gorgeous illustrations are paired with informative text about the work of the Wright brothers. Includes archival photographs and diagrams.

I Stink! written and illustrated by Jim and Kate McMullan. HarperCollins, 2002. A big city garbage truck stars in this engaging book about the importance of garbage collection, as he goes around the city eating everybody's garbage.

M Is for Music written by Kathleen Krull; illustrated by Stacy Innerst. Harcourt, 2003. This unique alphabet book introduces musical terms from allegro to zydeco and includes humorous collage-type illustrations.

Make Way for Ducklings written and illustrated by Robert McCloskey. Viking, 1941. In this classic and well-loved tale, Mr. and Mrs. Mallard search for a home for their duckling family. With help from a policeman named Michael, they are able to navigate the busy city streets.

On Noah's Ark written and illustrated by Jan Brett. Putnam, 2003. The familiar story of Noah's ark is told from his granddaughter's point of view, as she helps her grandfather calm the animals and keep them comfortable.

Otis written and illustrated by Loren Long. Philomel Books, 2009. Otis the tractor lives a happy life on the farm with his little calf friend, until a new yellow tractor replaces him. Surprisingly it is only Otis who can come to the rescue when the little calf gets into trouble.

Something from Nothing: Adapted from a Jewish Folktale written and illustrated by Phoebe Gilman. Scholastic, 1993. This modern adaptation of a Jewish folktale describes how the blanket Grandfather made for young Joseph is transformed over the years into a jacket, a button, and, ultimately, a story.

The Story of Ruby Bridges written by Robert Coles; illustrated by George Ford. Scholastic, 1995. Powerful story of six-year-old Ruby Bridges who confronted the hostility of white parents when she became the first African American girl to attend elementary school in New Orleans.

The Gods and Goddesses of Olympus written and illustrated by Aliki. Turtleback, 1997. An introduction to the gods and goddesses of Greek mythology brought to life by beautiful illustrations and intriguing text.

Reading to Help Every Child Get Ready to Read

Books Movement, Props, or Puppets

***Where the Wild Things Are* written and illustrated by Maurice Sendak. HarperCollins, 2012.** Max is sent to his room and begins to work out his feelings of anger by imagining a journey into the world of wild things.

***Bigger Than Daddy*, written by Harriet Ziefert. Blue Apple Books, 2006.** A small boy longs to be like his father, and they end up playing a game where they switch roles.

***How Do You Wokka-Wokka?* written by Elizabeth Bluemle. Candlewick Press, 2009.** Jazzy rhythms, silly rhymes, and bright illustrations accompany this zany tale of a group of multiethnic children who "wokka-wokka, shimmy-shake, and shocka-shocka" ending in a fun celebration with their neighbors.

***Groovy Joe: Ice Cream and Dinosaurs* by Eric Litwin** In his debut adventure, Groovy Joe faces three roaring dinosaurs hungry for his doggy ice cream! Oh no! But Joe knows just what to do and soon enough he has them all sharing while moving and singing along.

***Pete's a Pizza* by William Steig. Harper Collins, 1998.** When Pete feels miserable because rain makes it impossible to play ball outdoors, his father finds a fun indoor game to play with his son.

***The Gingerbread Boy* adapted and illustrated by Paul Galdone. Clarion Books, 1975.** An old couple bakes a gingerbread boy because they are childless, but the gingerbread boy runs away and escapes from various hungry predators. In the end, however, the gingerbread boy is unable to escape his fate when he meets the wily fox.

***The Three Billy Goats Gruff* by Jerry Pinkney. Little, Brown & Co, 2017.** The classic tale of big, bigger and biggest billy goats gruff who trip-trap across the bridge, as the hungry troll underneath tries to get a good meal. Fortunately, goats are much smarter than trolls!

***What To Do With a Box* by Jane Yolen. Creative Editions, 2016.** If you give a child a box, who can tell what will happen next? It may become a library or a boat. It could set the scene for a fairy tale or a wild expedition. The most wonderful thing is its seemingly endless capacity for magical adventure

***The Drummer Boy of John John* by Mark Greenwood. Lee & Low, 2012.** It's Carnival time in Trinidad and the residents of John John are busy preparing for the big Carnival parade. In the junkyard, Winston accidentally discovers that he can produce musical sounds from old discarded containers— biscuit tins, oil cans, pots, and pans.

***Fraidy-Zoo* by Thyra Heder, Harry N. Abrams, 2013.** As Little T's family hustles to get out the door for an outing, Little T lags behind. She is afraid to go back to the zoo; the only trouble is...she can't remember why. Her mom, dad, and sister construct homemade costumes and act out zoo animals to help Little T lose her fear.

***Ashley Bryan's Puppets: Making something from everything*, Atheneum Books for Young People, 2014.** Beloved storyteller and artist Ashley Bryan reveals the vibrant spirit of found objects in this magnificent treasury of poetry and puppets.

***I Got The Rhythm* by Connie Schofield-Morrison. Bloomsbury, 2014.** The little girl hears a rhythm coming from the world around her- from butterflies, to street performers, to ice cream sellers everything is musical! She sniffs, snaps, and shakes her way into the heart of the beat, finally busting out in an impromptu dance, which all the kids can join in on!

Singing to Help Every Child Get Ready to Read

Books With Song, Rhyme and Poetry

The Itsy Bitsy Spider by Iza Trapani, G. Stephens, 1996. A new magical, musical journey! This all-new itsy bitsy spider has exciting encounters with a fan, a mouse, a rocking chair, a cat and a big maple tree.

Happy! by Pharrell Williams, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2015. All the exuberance of the song pulses from these vibrant photographs of excited, happy kids.

Animal Trunk: Silly Poems to Read Aloud written by Charles Ghigna; illustrated by Gabriel. H. N. Abrams, 1999. Simple poems about the animal kingdom are enhanced by beautiful illustrations by Belgian artist Gabriel.

The Bill Martin Jr. Big Book of Poetry, Simon & Schuster, 2008. This full-color treasury contains nearly two hundred poems, all of them handpicked by Bill Martin Jr. Traditional children's poems are presented alongside contemporary rhymes.

The Neighborhood Sing-along by Nina Crews, Greenwillow, 2011. Playground songs and classroom songs, silly songs and sweet songs, wake-up songs and bedtime songs. Nina Crews brings her energetic style of illustration to this collection of thirty-four perennial favorites.

Green Eggs and Ham written and illustrated by Dr. Seuss. Random House, 1988. The classic story follows Sam I Am as he tries to convince a young friend that green eggs and ham are great and should be eaten everywhere.

It's Raining Laughter by Nikki Grimes, Dial Books, 1997. A collection of poems about children growing up, illustrated with photographs of African American children.

Where the Sidewalk Ends written and illustrated by Shel Silverstein. HarperCollins, 1974. A classic collection of the author/illustrator's light verse, accompanied by humorous drawings.

Sheep in a Jeep written by Nancy E. Shaw; illustrated by Margot Apple. Houghton Mifflin, 1986. A group of five sheep get into all sorts of shenanigans in this fun rhyming misadventure.

Miss Polly Has a Dolly written by Pamela Duncan Edwards; illustrated by Elicia Castaldi. Putnam, 2003. Children will enjoy reading along to this expanded version of the popular street rhyming chant (Miss Polly has a dolly who is sick, sick, sick).

Here's a Little Poem: a very first book of poetry by Jane Yolen. Candlewick, 2007. Greeting the morning, enjoying the adventures of the day, cuddling up to a cozy bedtime -- these are poems that highlight the moments of a toddler's world from dawn to dusk.

Let's clap, jump, sing, & shout; dance, spin, and turn it out! by Patricia McKissack. Schwartz & Wade, 2017. Here is a songbook, a storybook, a poetry collection, and much more, all rolled into one. Find a partner for hand claps, sing a song, tell a classic story.

Take me out of the bathtub and other silly dilly songs by Allen Katz, illustrated by David Catrow, McElderry Books, 2001. Silly rhymes are sung to familiar tunes. Guaranteed to produce gales of giggles.

Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes by Eric Litwin, illustrated by James Dean, Harper, 2010. Rhythm, rhyme and dance moves make this simple picture book into a wonderful shared reading and dancing experience.

Who Took the Cookies From the Cookie Jar by Bonnie Lass, Little Brown, 2000. An adaptation of the classic playground song. Help Skunk solve the mystery as he asks each of his animal friends, who took the cookie from the cookie jar?

Singing to Help Every Child Get Ready to Read

Books that You Can Sing

***Sing* by Joe Raposo, Henry Holt and Company, 2013.** Tom Lichtenheld has put a visual story to this timeless and universal song that celebrates perseverance, self-expression, and the power of music to help each of us find our voice.

***Give the Dog a Bone* by Steven Kellogg, SeaStar Books, 2000.** "Nick-nack, paddywhack, give the dog a bone, this old man went rolling home". But then what happens? Why, it's a wild, slapstick adventure involving cobblers, cats, chickens, and much, much more. From poodles to Great Danes, an increasing number of clever canine companions join in the fun.

***Skip to My Lou* by Nadine Bernard Westcott, Little Brown, 2000.** A little boy befriends a group of farm animals after they make a huge mess while his parents are gone.

***The Seals on the Bus* written by Lenny Hort, illustrated by G. Brian Karas. Henry Holt, 2000.** Set to the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus," the author adds many different animals to this fun bus adventure.

***There Was a Tree* by Rachel Isadora. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2012.** And the green grass grew all around, all around, the green grass grew all around! This beautiful picture book is based on the words to a popular song that has been entertaining children for decades.

***Puff the Magic Dragon* written by Peter Yarrow and Lenny Lipton, illustrated by Eric Puyberet, Sterling Publishing, 2007.** Puff is a slender-necked, benevolent dragon that follows his special friend, Jackie Paper, like an affectionate pup across a smoothly painted fantasy landscape.

***He's Got the Whole World in His Hands* by Kadir Nelson. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2005.** A beautifully illustrated version of the gospel hymn that is sung all around the world.

***Take Me Out to the Ballgame* by Jack Norworth, Four Winds Press, 1993.** The lyrics of the familiar song, illustrated by pictures based on the World Series games played between the Dodgers and the Yankees in 1949 in Ebbets Field.

***Miss Mary Mack* by Mary Ann Hoberman, Little Brown, 1998.** Everyone knows some version of this popular children's hand-clapping rhyme, but in this adaptation, the fateful jump over the fence is just the beginning of the fun.

***Jo MacDonald Walked in the Woods* by Mary Quattlebaum, illustrated by Laura J. Bryant, Dawn Publications, 2013.** This delightful variation on "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" playfully introduces youngsters to the woodland habitat while engaging little ones with rhythm and wordplay.

***The Wheels on the Tuk Tuk* by Kabir Seghal, illustrated by Jess Golden, Beach Lane Books, 2015.** A zany picture book about a wild ride on a tuk tuk taxi in India! This picture book brings an international twist to the beloved nursery rhyme.

***Octopus's Garden* by Ringo Starr, Aladdin Books, 2014.** This lively picture book brings Ringo Starr's joyful underwater tale to life and is perfect for reading, sharing, and singing.

***I Ain't Gonna Paint No More!* By Karen Beaumont. Harcourt, 2005.** Karen Beaumont's zippy text and David Catrow's zany illustrations turn an infamous childhood activity into raucous storytime fun, giving a silly twist to the fine art of self-expression.

Talking to Help Every Child Get Ready to Read

(Almost) Wordless books that make you the storyteller

***Flotsam* by David Wiesner. Clarion Books, 2006.** Vivid watercolors illustrate the story of an inquisitive boy who finds a camera on the beach. When the film is developed a surprising underwater world is revealed.

***The Whisper* by Pamela Zagarenski. Houghton Mifflin, 2015.** A girl tries to read a book without words, and she hears a whisper that tells her to find her own story in the pictures.

***The Lion & the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney. Little Brown, 2009.** When a lion spares a mouse's life, they both learn a valuable lesson about the importance of kindness in this beautifully illustrated adaption of one of Aesop's Fables.

***Chalk* by Bill Thompson. Marshall Cavendish, 2010.** Eye-catching illustrations tell the story of three children whose chalk drawings begin to do surprising things.

***A Ball for Daisy* by Chris Raschka.** Any child who has ever had a beloved toy break will relate to Daisy's anguish when her favorite ball is destroyed by a bigger dog.

***Sidewalk Flowers* by JonArno Lawson. Groundwood Books, 2015.** In this wordless picture book, a little girl collects wildflowers while her distracted father pays her little attention. Each flower becomes a gift, and whether the gift is noticed or ignored, both giver and recipient are transformed by their encounter.

***Inside Outside* by Lizi Boyd, Chronical Books, 2013.** What is happening outside today? Peek through the window to find out. What is happening inside? Peek again! Whimsical die-cuts throughout lead to charming and surprising reveals with every turn of the page.

dance in a rainstorm and play in the puddles, but when the boy sends his boat floating down a gutter stream, it leads him on a new adventure.

***Wave* by Suzy Lee. Chronicle Books, 2008.** This stunning picture book captures the wonders of a child's experiences at the beach.

***The Farmer and the Clown* by Marla Frazee. Beach Lane Books, 2014.** A baby clown is separated from his family when he accidentally bounces off their circus train and lands in a lonely farmer's field. As they interact, the two of them make some surprising discoveries about themselves-and about life!

***Draw!* by Raul Colon, Simon & Schuster, 2014.** In this wordless picture book, a boy who is confined to his room fills his sketch pad with lions and elephants, then imagines himself on a safari.

***Here I Am* by Patti Kim, Picture Window Books, 2014.** The tale of a young immigrant boy's first journey to his new home in America. Overcome by the foreign lights, noisiness, alien shapes, and new language, the boy takes solace in a single red seed pocketed from his past.

***Journey* by Aaron Becker, Candlewick Press, 2013.** Using a red marker, a young girl draws a door on her bedroom wall and through it enters another world where she experiences many adventures, including being captured by an evil emperor.

***The Island* by Marije Tolman, Lemniscaat Press, 2012.** A bear explores a series of islands in a vast, blue ocean, and various animal friends explore with him. He finally finds a best friend and music that speaks to his heart.

Bibliography

Stick and Stone

Big Words for Little People

In This Book

Jack's Garden

We Dig Worms

Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever

Tyrannosaurus Wrecks!

Have You Seen My New Blue Socks?

The Bill Martin Jr Big Book of Poetry

A Greyhound A Groundhog

Du Iz Tak?

The Neighborhood Mother Goose

The Wheels on the Tuk-Tuk

LMNOPs

BINGO

Shapes That Roll

The Turn-Around, Upside Down...

Alphablock

Dr Seuss's ABC

Oops Pounce Quick Run

Once Upon An Alphabet

I Want My Hat Back

Flora and the Penguin

Princess Hyacinth

Three Billy Goats Gruff



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