

Appendix B

Early Literacy Activities for Children and Parents

A Parent's Guide to Easy Times to Do These Activities

Activities that may help your child's early reading skills—what a great idea! And activities that use play as a means of learning about books and print really sound fun. You care and want your child to grow up to be the best reader he or she can be. But when can you find the time to use these activities? You know how little time you have to set aside just for activities like these—even if they are fun and develop early reading skills. Well, if these are your thoughts, then these activities are made for you! They are perfect for you and your child:

- They are written *especially for busy parents* who work, cook, drive to and from errands, and have busy, active lives.
- They are designed so that *you can do them while you are doing other things*, such as washing the dishes and driving the car.
- They are *short and easy to do*.
- They are *fun* for both children and parents.
- They *help your child learn skills* that contribute to reading.

To make them easy to use, the activities have been arranged by routines that will be familiar to every parent. So, you can pick the activities that you can do when you are busy with your hands (when you are driving the car or folding laundry) or those that are good at bedtime. Most of the activities take only a few minutes to do—so you can fit one into a trip to the grocery store, when you are waiting in the check-out line, or waiting for the microwave to heat dinner. We know that parents think that reading is very important. These short, easy activities are a parent's dream for how to fit successful learning activities into the family's active daily schedule.

WHEN YOU HAVE NO HANDS FREE

(Driving the car, fixing dinner, doing laundry, bathtime, and so forth) First Sound; Let's Use Words to Describe . . . !; Movie Reviews; Nursery Rhymes; Print in the World; Say it Fast; Sing a Song; Tell Me a Word that Rhymes with . . . !; That's My Name!; What Did You Hear?; What Will Happen Next?

WHEN YOU'RE SITTING DOWN TOGETHER

(Eating a meal, waiting in the laundromat, riding the bus, and so forth) Diaries; Let's Use Words to Describe . . . !; Writing Messages

WHEN GRANDPARENTS OR RELATIVES ARE VISITING

Draw a Picture; Getting to Know Books; Let's Dance!; Let's Draw the Building You Made!; Magic Password; Magnetic Letters; Making Signs; Measuring; My Very Own Book; Nursery Rhymes; Recipes; Scribbling; That's My Name!; Writing Messages

WHEN YOUR CHILD AND FRIENDS ARE TOGETHER

Let's Draw the Building You Made!; Magnetic Letters; Making Signs; Measuring; Recipes; Scribbling; Writing Messages

WHEN YOU HAVE SOME TIME ON A RAINY DAY

Art Portfolios; Draw a Picture; Getting to Know Books; Let's Dance!; Let's Draw the Building You Made!; Magic Password; Making Signs; Mapping the Territory; Measuring; My Very Own Book; Print in the Home; Print in the World; Recipes; Scribbling; Storybook Reading Routines; That's My Name

WHEN YOU HAVE JUST A FEW MINUTES BETWEEN ACTIVITIES

(Waiting in the grocery line, taking a walk, and so forth) First Sound; Let's Use Words to Describe . . . !; Movie Reviews; Nursery Rhymes; Print in the Home; Print in the World; Tell Me a Word that Rhymes with . . . !; That's My Name!; What Did You Hear?; What Will Happen Next?; Writing Messages

AT BEDTIME

Diaries; Getting to Know Books; Nursery Rhymes; Sing a Song; Storybook Reading Routines

ON A WALK OR AT THE PARK

Say it Fast; Tell Me a Word that Rhymes with . . . ; What Did You Hear?; What Will Happen Next?

SPECIAL TRIPS

Going Places—The Library; Going Places—The Museum; Going Places—The Zoo

ART PORTFOLIOS

Children often put a lot of effort into their drawings. Sometimes they express important things about their feelings and experiences. Why not keep these creative works and collect them in a special art portfolio file? It will be fun to look back at them later with your child and remember special events and experiences together. You can buy a cardboard art portfolio in an art supply store or use a large department store box to store the drawings, collages, and other artworks.

DIARIES

Give your child a spiral notebook to use as a diary. On a regular basis, encourage your child to draw pictures or dictate some comments about an event that happened during the day. Remember to note the dates. It will be fun to look back at these pages later together.

DRAW A PICTURE

Children use drawing to stand for writing. When children scribble and draw, they learn that the marks made on paper can mean something. These activities prepare children to understand that writing is a means of communicating a message. Encourage your child to draw or paint a picture and to tell you about the picture. Let your child choose the subject. If your child does not have any ideas that day, then suggest that he or she draw a person, favorite animal, toy or object, or recent event (for example, going to the zoo or park). Your child may tell you spontaneously things about the picture before, during, or after he or she has drawn or painted the picture. If your child does not say anything, then ask him or her some questions ["What shall we call this?" "What's happening?" "Tell me about your picture"]. Write down exactly what your child says, and read back his or her dictation.

FIRST SOUND

Have your child choose a word (for example, bear). Ask him or her to identify the first sound of that word (for example, the sound for b is /b/). If your child is unable to find the first sound, then help him or her ["B-b-b-bear"]. Then together try to think of other words that begin with the same sound and that are related to the chosen word (for example, brown, big). Have your child compose sentences with words that begin with the same sound (for example, Big brown bear . . .).

GETTING TO KNOW BOOKS

In English, we begin to read books at the front, not at the back, and words go from top to bottom and from left to right. Teach your child how to hold a book correctly and to turn pages in the correct direction. When your child begins to show interest in the print and not only the story, run your fingers under the words that you read. Highlight the left-to-right, top-to-bottom orientation of the written text. As your child begins to know some letters, ask him or her to point to a word that starts with the same letter as his or her name.

GOING PLACES—THE LIBRARY

Your local library is a great place to visit with your child. There you can find books, magazines, videotapes, music, and newspapers for adults and children of all ages. You can check out books for your child and you to take home, or you can spend time browsing through materials and searching for information on computers. You can get all kinds of information at the library not only on books but also on events and activities taking place in town as well as educational programs. Libraries also distribute other useful information such as bus schedules and tax forms. Some libraries even have play areas to keep younger children busy. And, of course, the librarians are always available to assist you. All this and at no charge! Many libraries will issue library cards to children of any age as long as they are accompanied by their parents, and many times children are not charged overdue fines if they forget to return their books on time.

GOING PLACES—THE MUSEUM

There are many types of museums that children will enjoy. Science museums have exhibits that help children understand how all sorts of things work. At natural history museums, children can learn all about animals, bugs, oceans, and volcanoes. Art museums introduce children to paintings and sculptures. Find out what is available in your area. Most museums have at least one day a month when entry is free of charge. Visit the museum with your child. Talk together about what you see. Read aloud the descriptive labels of the art pieces that your child has picked as his or her favorites. In some exhibitions, you can also watch movies or get information from a computer. Take home the brochures and use them later to show other people and to tell them what you saw.

GOING PLACES—THE ZOO

Going to the zoo is always a special treat for both children and adults. Animals are always a great topic for conversations with children. Use this opportunity to encourage language by asking questions and responding to your child's comments. Also point out animal names and other familiar words and letters on the written descriptive labels. Take photographs, and create a scrapbook with pictures of animals you saw. Have your child dictate labels and descriptions for the photographs. Your child can also draw and write about the zoo trip after you return home.

LET'S DANCE!

Children learn about rhythm by moving their bodies to music. Exploring rhythm helps children become sensitive to the temporal quality or the duration of sounds. Sing a song or listen to music that has different rhythms. With your child, dance to the different beats, clap hands, or use a drum. Begin with slow, regular, even beats, and later introduce uneven beats with variations in intensity and tempo. Relate movements to personal experiences ["Let's move slowly and pretend we are heavy elephants!" "Let's move fast and pretend we are flying on a plane!"]. Listen to some classical, Latin, or folk music. Talk about how the music makes you feel. What does it make you think of? Ask your child to draw a picture that goes with the music.

LET'S DRAW THE BUILDING YOU MADE!

Children often build things that need to be torn apart during cleanup time. Encourage your child to make a record of his or her accomplishments before the construction is torn apart. Compliment your child on the construction, then say something to encourage him or her to record it ["I can see you put lots of effort into making your castle so high. Let's draw a picture of it before you put the blocks away. That way we'll always remember what it looks like"]. You might start out by showing your child how to sketch and talk about what you are doing. Encourage your child to join in ["First, I'm drawing the blocks that make up the bottom layer. Now I'm making it higher. See how the color changes to yellow for the top row? Where's a yellow pen?"]. After your child has drawn the picture, ask your child to label the picture ["What shall we call it?"]. Help your child label the picture with meaningful letters or a few words to help him or her remember the construction.

LET'S USE WORDS TO DESCRIBE . . . I

Although children learn some descriptive words (for example, big) when they are very young, adults need to encourage other kinds of description. Children have strong opinions about food, so a wonderful way to start is to have your child talk about its color, texture, shape, smell, and taste. You can help your child develop a descriptive vocabulary by using these words around mealtime and in everyday conversation. On a walk outdoors, call your child's attention to the rough, spiky leaves of a tree or the striped, velvety petals of a flower. You can encourage your child to describe and classify things in the world around you (for example, help your child find things that are purple, things that taste sweet, or things that are shiny). The possibilities are endless. As you describe and classify with your child, you also develop the essential vocabulary that will help him or her successfully start in school.

MAGIC PASSWORD

Children learn to rhyme and to understand that words are made up of parts (for example, b-a-t, mom-my, un-der). Have your child enact pretend play activities with toy animals, blocks, and other materials. Tell your child that the animals have to guess a magic password to gain access to or to leave a location (for example, barn, zoo, trap, magic cave). Pretend you are the guardian and the child is the animal. Tell your child that the magic password can be a word that rhymes ["You have to say the magic password. Tell me a word that rhymes with dog"]. Then try asking your child to give you a password that is fragmented into syllables or sounds (for example, Pop-si-cle). When you are reading together or see a sign, point out to your child a written word ["Can you read this word?" (cat) "What word rhymes with cat?" "Can you read this word?" (hamburger) "Can you break it into parts?"].

MAGNETIC LETTERS

Arrange magnetic letters on the refrigerator, and encourage your child to play with them in a variety of ways when you are in the kitchen together. By taking them off of the refrigerator and putting them back on, your child can learn about colors, shapes, letter names, and sounds. Spell your child's name often, and leave it on the refrigerator so that your child will learn to recognize it. Do the same for other names of people and objects that are important to your child. Older children can read and write simple words with the letters. You can also use the letters to write simple messages. If, for example, you are going to the zoo, then you can write "zoo" and talk about the outing during breakfast. Use the letters to attach to pictures or photographs of the words you write (for example, Dad and a photograph of Dad, cat and a picture of a cat). Use a letter to attach to a picture of an object with a name that begins with that letter of the alphabet (for example, the letter O and a picture of an orange). You can also play matching games (for example, choosing a letter and having your child find the same letter) and word guessing games (for example, choosing a letter and thinking of words that begin with that letter).

MAKING SIGNS

Children learn about words and how sounds and symbols go together as they make signs to use in their play. Help your child make signs he or she can use as part of construction activities (for example, Stop!, Go around, Open, Closed, Exit). As your child finds a need for new signs, help him or her create meaningful signs that can be placed around the house (for example, a picture of a crayon to label the drawer or box in which your child keeps coloring materials).

MAPPING THE TERRITORY

Children can learn that maps represent real places by developing models and drawings of areas familiar to them. For example, landscapes can be created by playing with sand in a sandbox. Help your child to model familiar home or neighborhood features and to talk about how these features are arranged. Encourage your child to enact pretend play scenes using these landscapes as contexts ["How will the bear walk to the store?" "Shall we go down this street?"]. Talk about events that occurred in these contexts ["Remember when we went bike riding? Where did we go?"]. Encourage your child to recall events related to the outing. Use paper and crayons to draw with your child a model of the park or your child's favorite room. Talk about where objects would be located, and add details to the drawing ["Where shall we put the swings? Are they close to the trees or far away?"]. Use print to label objects (for example, stove, table) and activities (for example, cooking, eating).

MEASURING

Science requires the use of reading and writing skills. For example, writing records of observations and taking measurements are important scientific activities. Practice literacy skills as you and your child do simple science projects. 1) Keep track of your child's height. Make your own growth chart (for example, tape a long strip of paper against a wall) or use an already-made growth chart. Mark your child's height, and then have your child measure with a measuring tape and record the numbers and observation dates. 2) Plant beans or seeds. Help your child measure the growth of the plants and record the heights and dates as well as other observations in a notebook or on a graph. 3) Have a long-jump competition. Mark the starting point of the jump with tape or another object. Use a measuring tape with easy-to-read numbers to measure the jumps. Help your child read the numbers on the tape and record the length of the jumps along with the names of the competitors. 4) Use blocks to measure different objects. Have your child stack blocks next to different objects until the tower reaches the same height as the objects. Help your child count the blocks, record numbers, or draw lines that correspond to the different heights. Compare the differences.

MOVIE REVIEWS

After watching a television show or a movie with your child, set aside a few minutes to talk about what you watched. Ask your child to tell you about the story or topic and what he or she liked and disliked about the show. This will help your child develop communication and narrative language skills and learn how to express opinions and make judgments. Ask questions that will help your child learn about the sequence and causes of events ["When did that happen?" "What happened next?" "Why did he do that?"].

MY VERY OWN BOOK

With your child, paste photographs or pictures from magazines in a notebook or on sheets of paper that can be stapled together. Write a short sentence to go with the pictures. You can make books about special events (for example, a vacation or a trip) or about topics of interest to your child (for example, dinosaurs, astronauts, fish).

NURSERY RHYMES

We all know that children take great delight in nursery rhymes. Rhyming during the preschool years helps children to learn to read more easily in first grade. Read traditional Mother Goose nursery rhymes and other rhyming books and songs with your child. Have some pictures of familiar nursery rhymes for your child to color and place in prominent places (for example, the bathroom mirror, the car dashboard, the refrigerator). Encourage your child to say the rhymes along with you.

PRINT IN THE HOME

The best way for a child to learn about literacy is to see how reading and writing are integral parts of daily home routines. Have books, newspapers, and magazines in your house; and show your child their value by reading them yourself. Whenever you have a chance, show your child that print is a source of information (for example, cook from a written recipe, use a manual to fix a piece of equipment, look in the telephone book to find a telephone number). Place pictures and bookshelves in your house, especially in your child's room. Use a message board, chalkboard, or the refrigerator to display simple messages, drawings, songs, or nursery rhymes. Create a special place with a small table, chair, and crayons for your child to draw or write. Visit bookstores and libraries so your child has books of his or her own to read and look at.

PRINT IN THE WORLD

Learning to read and to write is a process that begins at a very early age. Children are continually exposed to many forms of print (for example, signs, labels, logos, symbols). On outings and at home with your younger child(ren), draw their attention to road signs; grocery store, gas station, and restaurant logos; signs in restaurants (for example, men's and women's bathrooms); and letters on cereal boxes. There are so many different kinds of signs in our homes and communities. It will be fun to see which ones your child likes and learns to identify. Suggest that your child might want to make some signs for the house. Give your child some cardboard to draw signs for his or her room, the kitchen, the front door, or your pet's corner.

RECIPES

Preparing food can help a child understand the relationship between printed directions and the organized actions of one or more person(s), and the results are delicious. Children learn that print can be used to label and identify ingredients as well as to record and to remember steps in sequence. Let your child help you decide on a favorite recipe to cook together on a rainy day. The recipe could be as simple as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Examine labels with your child, and ask sequencing and quantity questions as your recipe progresses ["I have the bread ready. What is our next step?" "How much jelly do you think we should use?" "What happens when there is too much jam?"]. Look for children's recipe books in bookstores or at your local library.

SAY IT FAST

Breaking down words into syllables and sounds helps the child become aware that words not only have meaning but also are characterized by sounds. It also helps your child understand the sound-letter association involved in reading and writing. During daily activities (for example, driving in your car, walking to the grocery store), play word games with your child. Say a word by breaking it down into syllables ["Look! There's a spi-der!"]. Have your child guess the word ["Can you say that word fast?"].

SCRIBBLING

Scribbling is the very first step to writing. Even though your child's early attempts to write may not resemble conventional letters and words, do not worry because they will eventually. Encourage your child to write pretend words and messages and to tell you what they may mean. Create a writing scrapbook. Paste photographs or draw pictures, and have your child pretend to write something about the picture. What will your child write? Your child may write a short message consisting of a shape or a straight line or a longer message with full lines of scribbling, perhaps some letter-like forms, and, later, even recognizable words and letters.

SING A SONG

Singing a song is a fun and natural way to help children become sensitive to the different qualities and sounds of words. During daily activities (for example, driving in your car, bathtime), sing favorite songs with your child, especially songs with words that rhyme. Once your child becomes familiar with the words, you can take turns at singing verses. Eventually, you can invent your own songs together and even play with nonsense words and verses!

STORYBOOK READING ROUTINES

The first important thing that children need to experience about literacy is the pleasure involved in reading stories together with an adult. You can begin sharing picture storybooks with your child from a very early age. Find a quiet place and time (bedtime is usually a good time) to look at books on a regular basis. You can encourage exploration of the books and print by talking with your child about the pictures, pointing to words as you read, and asking your child to tell or read the story to you (if your child is so inclined). Listen and respond to your child's comments and questions. Associate characters and events in the book with the child's own experience. Story time with your child is a wonderful way to stimulate a love for books and pleasant anticipation for learning to read in school.

TELL ME A WORD THAT RHYMES WITH . . . !

We use language to communicate ideas and feelings; but we also use language when we tell jokes, invent poems, and use slang. Rhyming is one way of playing with the sounds of words that you can practice with your child. Take turns guessing words that rhyme with each other or that sound the same. Let your child be creative by inventing nonsense words, too, as long as they rhyme. Rhyming helps children learn to read. It helps children understand that not only do words have meaning, but they also are composed of collections of sounds.

THAT'S MY NAME!

One of the first printed words children learn to recognize is their own name. Find ways for your child to see his or her name in print. Make a name tag for his or her bedroom door and for objects that belong to him or her. Write your child's name on his or her drawings and on letters and cards to family members. Once your child has learned to recognize his or her name, teach your child letter names, beginning with the first letter. Point out other words in the environment that start with the same first letter.

WHAT DID YOU HEAR?

At home or on a walk to a park, listen for sounds that may occur and for which the source is not directly in sight (for example, water dripping in another room, a bird or an animal up in a tree, a car around the bend). Draw your child's attention to the sound. Ask your child to describe the sound, guess from where it came, and what he or she thinks happened. This guessing game can be really fun. It will help your child improve listening skills, problem-solve, and develop the ability to use language to describe objects and events.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

Reading and writing help us describe and document events in the past and future and in far-away settings. This is an activity to do when reading familiar stories and during familiar routines (for example, mealtime, bedtime, bathtime). Invite your child to tell you what will happen next in the story or what will happen next on your drive to the grocery store. Predicting events helps your child go beyond the immediate here-and-now. It will help your child when he or she begins to read.

WRITING MESSAGES

In school, your child is learning that print is a tool for communication. Your child is learning how spoken words can be captured on paper and preserved for others to read. Each day, your child's teacher will write a message with the children, telling about important events that take place in the classroom. At the end of the day, the teacher might ask the children to tell about a significant event that happened to them and record it to be reread the following day. You can encourage your child to use written messages at home. Ask your child to dictate a short message to give to an older sibling or other adults in the home, send to friends or teachers at school, or mail to relatives. Encourage your child to write or copy a few words and draw or paste pictures to communicate a message. You can also leave written messages for your child. For example, you can write a short note or draw a picture of an upcoming event or a weekend outing (for example, the zoo, the grocery store, a mountain hike). Writing and reading messages are fun ways to stimulate literacy.