

BUILDING READERS®

SETA Head Start
Alma Hawkins, S.S.P.I. Specialist

How Families Can Help Children Get Ready to Read

Valentine's Day brings lovely ways for your child to learn about language

Fill your little one's Valentine's Day with language learning! Preschoolers enjoy this fun holiday—and it's a terrific opportunity to nurture your child's love of reading.

Here are two kid-friendly activities to try:

- 1. Heart ABCs.** Cut hearts out of construction paper. Write a different letter of the alphabet on each one. With your child, use the hearts to spell out short words.
- 2. Collage cards.** Help your child cut words and pictures from old magazines. Fold a sheet of paper in half to form a card and glue the cutouts to the front. Write a Valentine's message inside, and have her give her masterpiece to someone special.



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"Reading aloud with children is the single most important activity for building the knowledge and skills they will eventually require for learning to read."

—Dr. Marilyn Jager Adams

Celebrate a bookish Valentine's Day!

Choosing books for your child can be tricky. But it shouldn't feel like a chore! To narrow your search at the bookstore or library, try focusing on a theme (anything from animals to outer space).

To make this month's hunt for good stories a bit easier, seek out titles with Valentine's Day themes. After all, February is all about candy hearts and Cupid! Here are a few perfect-for-preschoolers titles to try:

- **10 Valentine Friends** by Janet Schulman.
- **Happy Valentine's Day, Curious George!** by N. DiAngelo.
- **Hedgehog: A Sharp Lesson in Love** by Benn Sutton.
- **Monster Boy's Valentine** by Carl Emerson.
- **Panda's Valentine's Day** by Tara Jaye Morrow.
- **Plant a Kiss** by Amy Krouse Rosenthal.
- **Valentine Mice!** by Bethany Roberts.
- **Clifford's Valentine Day** by Norman Bridwell.

Birthday book helps keep track of what your child learns

Birthdays are a good time to remind your child of his accomplishments. Record things your child has learned during the past year in a "Things-I-Know Book." During the past year he might have learned to jump rope, recognize certain words and set the table. On each birthday, update the book and review past entries together.



Letter magnets help pass the miles

Going to be in the car for a while? Give your child a rimmed metal cookie sheet and a sack full of alphabet magnets. She can pass the time by practicing her ABCs!



Source: "Hints from Heloise," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 13, 2011, The Washington Post Company.

Liven up story time by including silly voices and theme music



Reading aloud can get repetitive. But if you're bored, your child can hear it in your voice—and won't find storytime as much fun. So keep it interesting for both of you! To surprise your child the next time you share bedtime stories:

- **Use an unexpected voice.** Who says the Big Bad Wolf has to sound growly? What if he had a funny accent—or the hiccups?
- **Add a soundtrack.** Reading a fast-paced tale? Jazz it up with some punchy background music!

Learning to rhyme? Go online!

Rhymes put the “fun” in reading fundamentals! Not only that, they teach kids about the sounds letters make. Even better, rhymes demonstrate the concept that changing a word’s beginning sound changes the word itself.



Try these simple (and free!) online games to boost your child’s rhyming smarts:

- **Rhymes with Digby** (www.bbc.co.uk/schools/laac/words/dg3.shtml). Help the shoveling mole dig in the dirt to find rhymes. With three difficulty levels to choose from, your child can challenge herself to tougher and tougher rhymes.
- **Reggie the Rhyming Rhino** (<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bll/reggie/index.htm>). Visit spots around the “neighborhood” as Reggie searches for matching pairs of picture words.

Which reading milestones are on the horizon?

Believe it or not, your not-even-done-with-preschool child will likely reach several reading milestones by the time he finishes kindergarten.

There’s no need to hurry him along, though. Learning to read is a marathon—not a sprint. And there’s no “perfect” time line for mastering it!

Although all kids are different, most kindergartners can:

- **Name** all the letters of the alphabet.
- **Match** upper- and lowercase letters.
- **Recognize** their names in print.
- **Understand** that letters make sounds.
- **Identify** the sounds many letters make.
- **Write** their first names using both upper- and lowercase letters.



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Source: L.K. Rath, Ed.D. and L. Kennedy, *The Between the Lions Book for Parents*, HarperCollins.



Q: My preschooler doesn’t seem to like story time. How can I spark her interest?

A: Instead of choosing books *for* her, have her choose books *for* you. “I don’t know what to read to myself for story time, honey. Can you find something?” Eagerly read aloud whatever she brings you, but don’t ask her to listen. Chances are, you won’t have to!

Do you have a question about reading? Email readingadvisor@parent-institute.com.

Touch-and-feel teaches letters

It’s a classic activity, but there’s a reason classics are eternal favorites. Let your child practice his letters with some indoor “snow”—also known as shaving cream!



Here’s what to do:

1. **Get a shallow bowl** or brownie pan and some foaming shaving cream.
2. **Fill the container** with the shaving cream.
3. **Let your child have fun** tracing letters into the cream.

Books to delight your early reader

- **Llama Llama Home With Mama** by Anna Dewdney (Viking Juvenile). No school today for little Llama—he’s too sneezy! But what happens at lunch-time when Mama says, “Ah-choo”? Uh, oh!
- **If You Give a Dog a Donut** by Laura Numeroff (Balzer & Bray). If you give the pup something yummy to eat, he’ll just want apple juice! And if you give him apple juice, he’ll just want ...
- **The Three Little Aliens and the Big Bad Robot** by Margaret McNamara (Schwartz & Wade). Children of all ages will love this outer-space take on the classic *Three Little Pigs* story. Don’t miss the map of the planets in the endpapers!



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How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Writer: Holly Smith.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525, ISSN: 1533-3299

www.parent-institute.com