

# Building Readers®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

SETA Head Start

Alma Hawkins, S.S.P.I. Specialist

## Little tasks lead to large improvements in motor skills

Boost your rookie writer's fine-motor skills and she'll be a "pencil-holding" whiz in no time! To strengthen the muscles she'll use when writing, encourage her to:

- **Squeeze** and mold play dough.
- **Close** and open her hands.
- **Finger paint**.
- **Stack blocks**, toys or other objects.
- **Shuffle** and then deal a deck of cards.
- **Wind yarn** neatly around a spool.
- **Solve** connect-the-dot puzzles.
- **Staple** papers together (with your supervision).
- **Practice** locking and unlocking doors with a key.
- **Tie ribbons** or shoestrings into bows.
- **Zip** and button clothing.
- **Type** on a keyboard.
- **Pick up** small items using tweezers or kitchen tongs.



Getty Images/Photodisc

**Source:** "Lotsa Lesson Plans - Fine Motor Skills/Finger Plays," Hummingbird Educational Resources, [www.hummingbirded.com/fine-motor.html](http://www.hummingbirded.com/fine-motor.html).

## Storytelling bolsters your child's brainpower

Inventing stories for your child isn't just fun for you. Studies show it can have a big impact on him, too. When you tell your child stories:

- **It sparks his imagination.** That causes "feel-good" hormones (endorphins) to release in his body. These hormones can create a sense of well-being.
- **It stimulates his brain.** When you stoke your child's imagination, it engages large parts of his brain. The pre-frontal lobes—where many higher brain functions happen—are especially involved.

Storytelling is also ideal for nurturing your child's language skills. And, of course, it's free!

**Source:** Odds Bodkin, "Telling Stories to Your Kids, Part Three," Storyteller.net, [www.storyteller.net/articles/181](http://www.storyteller.net/articles/181).

## Snack and learn the alphabet



When it comes to learning the alphabet, you already engage your youngster's mind. But what about his tummy? To make the ABCs fun and delicious, bake alphabet letters!

Here's how:

1. **Open** a package of store-bought bread or biscuit dough.
2. **Help** your child roll it into strips.
3. **Shape** each strip into a different letter.
4. **Bake** and cool.
5. **Savor** your "letter-perfect" snacks with your child.

## Build a reading fort



Take story time under-cover: Bring books, a flashlight and some sheets to the living room. Help your child drape the sheets over the furniture to create a "reading fort." Climb inside together and enjoy your fort.

## Switch up your book choices



Widen your child's horizons by offering her different types of books to read. During your next visit to

the library or bookstore, look for:

- **ABC and counting books.**
- **"Action" books** that feature flaps to lift or tabs to pull.
- **Books of poetry.**
- **Pattern books** with repeating text.

There's a huge variety of titles to choose from—so get started reading!

**Source:** "Choosing Books for Young Children," Reading Is Fundamental, [www.rif.org/parents/articles/Choosing\\_Books.msp](http://www.rif.org/parents/articles/Choosing_Books.msp).

### Practice patterns, matching and memory skills

Learning to read involves more than just learning letters and sounds. Your child learns other reading skills when she:

- **Plays with patterns.** Make a pattern by placing a red block, then a blue one, then red, etc., on the table. Ask your child to copy it. Add more colors as she improves.
- **Uses her memory.** Put eight items on a tray. Let your child look for about a minute. Take the tray away. Ask her how many items she can remember.
- **Makes matches.** Draw three people. Make them all the same—but put a hat on one. See if your child can pick out what is different. If this is too easy for her, try a more subtle difference. Put an extra button on one person's shirt.

**Source:** Claudia Jones, *Parents Are Teachers, Too*, ISBN: 0-9135-8935-7 (Williamson Publishing Company, [www.idealsbooks.com](http://www.idealsbooks.com)).

### 'Listen and Name' hones language, listening skills

Talking with your child is a terrific way to improve his language-learning skills, because it exposes him both to new words and to the “feel” of conversation.

If you're not sure what to chat about, though, try playing “Listen and Name.” It will sharpen his listening and thinking skills. Better yet, it's fun (and great for waiting-room visits or car trips).

To play, ask your child to name:

- **Something that's slimy.**
- **Something that gallops.**
- **Something that swims.**
- **Something that melts.**
- **Something that climbs.**



Getty Images/Photodisc

As he gets better and more creative, challenge him with trickier ones. Can he name “something that sparkles”?

**Source:** June R. Oberlander, *Slow and Steady, Get Me Ready*, ISBN: 1-5916-0236-X (Xulon Press, [www.xulonpress.com](http://www.xulonpress.com)).



### Books to delight your early reader

**The Kissing Hand** by Audrey Penn (Tanglewood Press). Poor Chester Raccoon doesn't want to go to school. He'd rather stay home with Mommy! Will a special kiss keep her love nearby all day?

**Fancy Nancy** by Jane O'Connor (HarperCollins). Nancy knows glitter and glam can't be beat! But how will she inspire her less-than-fancy family to get gussied up before heading out for pizza?

### Inspire a love of reading



Does your preschooler balk whenever story time rolls around? To motivate your child to *want* to

read:

- **Make it fun.** Story time shouldn't be a chore—it should be a delight! So be playful when reading with your child.
- **Put him in charge.** Let your child choose which books to read—even if he always picks the same ones. You may cringe at the thought of reading a particular tale over and over, but do it anyway.
- **Go on location.** Who says story time has to happen inside? Grab a blanket and share books in the back yard.

*“If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales.”*  
—Albert Einstein



**Q:** My preschooler scatters her books everywhere! How can I get her to take better care of them?

**A:** Give your child a safe place to keep her books—a shelf, a milk crate, etc.—and insist she put them there when she's done reading. It'll take a while, but putting her books away may eventually become a habit.

Do you have a question about reading? Email [readingadvisor@parent-institute.com](mailto:readingadvisor@parent-institute.com).

**Building Readers®**  
*How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers*

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Writer: Holly Smith.

Copyright © 2009, The Parent Institute® (a division of NIS, Inc.)  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525, ISSN: 1533-3299  
[www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com)