



Ages and Stages of Young Readers

Sean Brotherson, Ph.D.
Family Science Specialist
NDSU Extension Service

Learning to read is an intellectual milestone. Parents fret over it, teachers focus on it and children learn to see it as a mark of competence. As with other aspects of a child's development, language development and reading skills emerge step by step through time with young children.

Young Children and Learning to Read

Many parents want their children to learn the alphabet and begin reading at very young ages. Such encouragement is important. However, as with many skills, learning language and literacy is something that children develop as they become ready. Pushing children to read too early is not likely to improve their abilities. Parents and caregivers should provide opportunities, encouragement and instruction, but also should be patient and have reasonable expectations.

Most children are ready to really start learning the basics of reading (letter recognition, sounding out words, etc.) around ages 4 or 5. The foundations for reading begin much earlier, though, with listening to stories, making sounds, commenting on books and talking with adults. Reasonable expectations for engaging young children in reading activities are offered in the sections that follow.

Newborn to 3 Months

- A new baby likes the sound of a familiar voice, a book or newspaper read aloud, or soft singing. Content is not as important as the comforting, caring sound of a parent's voice.
- Be aware of your baby's cues that he or she has had enough – turning his or her head, fussing, hiccups, etc.

- Sing and dance with your baby; gentle rocking is soothing.
- Contentment with reading to your baby will depend highly on the child's mood and interest, and may be very brief.
- Hold books close enough for child to touch and see – this helps develop depth perception.
- Supporting a baby's head and neck while holding a book may be challenging at times. Put the book at the side of the crib or flat on the floor for the baby.
- Use cardboard or cloth books with brightly colored pictures. Touching and grabbing the book is as important at this stage as anything.

4 to 6 Months

- Chewy books – vinyl or washable – are appropriate.
- More touching is important now, so have books that babies can handle within easy reach.
- Treat books like toys at this age.
- Sing songs during routine times, such as diaper changing time, nap time or bath time.

7 to 9 Months

- Newly developed hand skills now allow young children to turn chubby pages, board books, etc.
- Paper is appealing for its sound and texture (be careful of choking hazards).

NDSU
Extension Service

North Dakota State University
Fargo, North Dakota 58105

FEBRUARY 2007

- Point to things in picture books and name them, make sounds, etc.
- At this age, having pictures upside down, and opening and closing the book frequently, is normal for a child.
- Follow the child's lead when he or she is done with reading.

9 to 12 Months

- A book's content, pictures and colors capture attention now. Let children at this stage linger over pictures or colors.
- Children still need chubby pages or cardboard books.
- Enjoy books about family or familiar items, such as foods, toys or animals.
- Paper pages still cannot survive this toddler!
- Large, clear, realistic pictures are important.
- Have a basket, shelf or other place for books to teach children the value of books.

12 to 18 Months

- A child is beginning to blossom in language skills at this age.
- Children like verse, rhythm and repetitive words.
- They relate to thematic books that become interesting (farm animals, pets, colors, etc.).
- Children like action with nursery rhymes.
- Give lots of attention to the three R's – rhythm, rhyme and repetition.
- Have more than one "book and snuggle time" a day – don't just save books for bedtime.
- Children enjoy the same book over and over and over and over again!
- Books at bedtime make a good transition between active and restful times, and help establish a clear bedtime routine.

1½ to 3 Years

- Children enjoy books about the main events in their life, such as potty, mom and dad, siblings, eating, toys, animals, etc.
- Rhyme lets the toddler participate verbally in reading by repeating a phrase.

- Children can begin to predict what will happen in logical sequence.
- Children like pop-up books, bathtub books and flip-up page books.
- Children can repeat nursery rhymes.

3 to 5 Years

- Children recognize books by the cover.
- They understand that books are read from front to back.
- They understand that printed words and pictures tell the story.
- Children begin to recognize letters within words, especially those in their own name.
- Children play with language, using sing-song and nonsense sounds, and simple poems.
- They may play out roles of characters in favorite stories.
- Encourage the young child to join you in reading familiar parts or filling in the blank.
- Read together every day. Spend time talking about stories, pictures and words. Ask many open-ended questions and take time to answer.
- Children may not always sit still for a story (depends on mood and personality), but they will listen while drawing or playing.
- Be a reader and writer yourself. Children learn habits from the people around them and may pretend to read a book themselves, modeling after adults who read.
- Visit the library often – story time, computers and other exciting activities await.
- Share conversations with your child during mealtimes and at other times you are together – kids learn words more easily when they are heard often.
- Children will enjoy concept books, such as A-B-C books, and will begin learning letters of the alphabet and pointing them out.
- Children will make efforts to draw letters, their own name, familiar words, etc.
- Begin spelling out names or objects and help children learn the names of letters.

Suggested Books for Young Children

Toddler

Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown
I Am a Bunny by Richard Scarry
 Mother Goose
Pat the Bunny by Dorothy Kunhardt
Sam Who Never Forgets by Eve Rice
Shopping Trip by Helen Oxenbury
Taste the Raindrops by Ann Hines
The Very Busy Spider by Eric Carle

3 to 4 Years

Caps For Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina
Freight Train by Donald Crews
Jamberry by Bruce Degen
Rosie's Walk by Pat Hutchins
The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown
The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats
The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter
The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle

5 to 6 Years

Alpha Bears by Michael Hague
Bear's Shadow by Frank Asch
Bedtime for Frances by Russell Hoban
Mike Mulligan by Virginia Lee Burton
Napping House by Audrey Wood
Planting A Rainbow by Lois Ehlert
The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper
Will I Have A Friend by Mariam Cohen

Books Good for Babies (cloth, laminated pages)

Baby's Clothes; Baby's Home; Baby's Toys; Mommy and Me by Neil Ricklin
The Cow Says Moo by J. Miller
Zoo Animals; Pets; Field Animals by V. Greeley
Count-A-Saurus by Nancy Blumenthal
How Many Kisses Goodnight? by Jean Monrad
Numbears: A Counting Book by Kathleen Hague
Read To Me, I'll Read To You by John Ciardi
Where's Spot? by Eric Hill
Where's the Bunny? by Ruth Caroll

Books About Families

All Kinds of Families by Norma Simon
A Baby for Max by Kathryn Lasky
Betsy's Baby Brother by Gunilla Wolde
Big Sister and Little Sister; A Father Like That; The Quiet Mother and the Noisy Little Boy by Charlotte Zolotow
Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families by Marc Brown and Laurene Krasny
Granddaddy's Place; Grandmother and I by Helen Buckley
I Love My Sister Most of the Time by Elaine Eldman
Mothers Can Do Anything by Joe Lasken
My Mom Travels a Lot by Caroline Bauer
My Mama Needs Me by Mildred Walker

Books About Daily Life

Bedtime for Frances by Russell Hoban
The Blanket; The School by John Burmingham
Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown
Ira Sleeps Over by Bernard Waber
Just Like Me by Ruth McKay
Little Rabbit's Loose Tooth by Luch Bate

Books About Feelings

Best Friends; Be My Valentine; Tough Jim; Lost in the Museum; Will I Have a Friend? by Mariam Cohen
Boy, Was I Mad by Kathryn Hitte
Don't Touch My Room by Patricia Lakin
The Hating Book; The Unfriendly Book; The Quarreling Book by Charlotte Jolotow
I'll Fix Anthony; Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst
There's A Nightmare in My Closet by Mercer Mayer
Where the Wild Things Are; Outside Over There by Maurice Sendak

Books About People of Different Races and Different Lands

Arrow to the Sun by Gerald McDermott
Ashanti to Zulu by Margaret Musgrove
Bringing Rain to Kapiti Plain: A Nandi Tale; Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears by Verna Aardema
The Five Chinese Brothers by Claire Bishop
Island Winter by Charles Martin
Issun Boshi: An Old Tale of Japan by Maroko Ishil
It Could Always Be Worse: A Yiddish Folk Tale by Margot Zemach
Jambo Means Hello by Muriel Feelings
King Island Christmas by Jean Rogers
The Rooster Who Understood Japanese by Yoshiko Uchida
The Story About Ping by Majorie Flack
Tikki Tikki Tembo by Arlene Mosel
When Clay Sings; Hawk, I'm Your Brother by Byrd Baylor
Where the Buffaloes Begin by Olaf Baker

Recommended Resources

■ Books and Pamphlets

Cullinan, Bernice E. (2000). *Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read*. New York: Scholastic Inc.

This book by Cullinan overviews hands-on, practical ideas for creating an environment where children learn to read and enjoy it.

Graves, Ruth (Ed.). (1987). *The RIF Guide to Encouraging Young Readers*. New York: Doubleday and Co.

An excellent source of activities for the whole family and a key resource for ideas to encourage and promote reading with young children. Hundreds of activities to engage children in reading, reading lists and good resource sections.

Hoyt, Carolyn. (2000). *The Best Way to Teach Kids How to Read*. *Parenting*, September 2000, 150-156.

This accessible, easy-to-read article provides insights on how children learn to read, why it is important and how parents can assist their children with reading.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). *Raising a Reader, Raising a Writer: How Parents Can Help* (pamphlet). Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

This pamphlet provides a rich set of ideas that parents can utilize in creating a good reading environment for their children. This NAEYC brochure (Order No. 530) can be ordered in units of 100 for \$15 (or 50 cents for singles) by contacting the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1426, calling (800) 424-2460 or going online at www.naeyc.org.

The Partnership for Reading. (2005). *Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read*. Jessup, Md.: National Institute for Literacy.

This brochure provides a research-based set of recommendations for parents and caregivers to help children in learning to read. This brochure can be obtained through contacting the National Institute for Literacy at ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398, calling (800) 228-8813 or going online at www.nifl.gov.

Trelease, Jim. (2001). *The New Read-Aloud Handbook* (5th ed.). New York: Penguin.

Highly regarded resource on reading with children from a leader in the field. Very good resource for parents, teachers and other adults.

U.S. Department of Education. (2005). *Helping Your Child Become a Reader* (booklet). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Education Publications Center.

This booklet shares recent research findings and practical advice on how to help your children become good readers. For a copy, send a request to: ED Pubs, Education Publications Center, U.S. Department of Education, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. Also, you may send a request by e-mail to edpubs@inet.ed.gov or visit the Web site at www.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/list.jhtml.

Learning language
and literacy is something
that children develop
as they become
ready



■ Web Sites and Organizations

The America Reads Challenge was a four-year grass-roots initiative designed to promote reading across the United States. Information and resources from that initiative can be accessed on the Internet. The Web site is at www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/

The International Reading Association is an organization that promotes literacy and is a well-developed resource base for parents and professionals interested in reading. It publishes a number of brochures for parents and single copies are available free. For titles and ordering information, go to the Web site or write to IRA, 800 Barksdale Road, P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139. The Web site is at www.reading.org/

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This organization is perhaps the foremost resource for outstanding research and practical ideas on learning and education of young children. NAEYC has dozens of resources (pamphlets, books, videos, etc.) available on the topic. The Web site is at www.naeyc.org.

The National Education Association has a Web site that includes a variety of valuable and interesting resources, including reading news, home and classroom activities, and reading resources for parents. To access the parent resources of the NEA, visit the Web site on the Internet. The Web site is at www.nea.org/parents/index.html.

Reading is Fundamental Inc. is a national nonprofit organization associated with the Smithsonian Institution that works to stimulate reading and learning with children. For further information or to access its excellent resources, visit the Web site on the Internet. The Web site is at www.rif.org/.

Read to Me International is an organization that works to help parents bring the joys and benefits of reading to their children. It has information on good children's books, parent resources and other topics related to reading at home. The Web site is at www.readtomeintl.org/index.cfm.

■ References

- Anderson, R.C., Hiebert, E.H., Scott, J.A., and Wilkinson, I.A.G. (1985). *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
- Cullinan, Bernice E. (2000). *Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read*. New York: Scholastic Inc.
- Dodge, T., and Colker, L. (1992). *Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood*. Washington, D.C.: Teaching Strategies Inc.
- Graves, Ruth (Ed.). (1987). *The RIF Guide to Encouraging Young Readers*. New York: Doubleday and Co.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). *Raising a Reader, Raising a Writer: How Parents Can Help* (pamphlet). Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. (2005). *Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy*. Washington, D.C.: NGA Center for Best Practices.
- Strickland, Dorothy S., and Morrow, Lesley Mandel (Eds.). (1989). *Emerging Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- The Partnership for Reading. (2005). *Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read*. Jessup, Md.: National Institute for Literacy.
- Trelease, Jim. (2001). *The New Read-Aloud Handbook* (5th ed.). New York: Penguin.

For more information on this and other topics, see: www.ag.ndsu.edu

This publication may be copied for noncommercial, educational purposes in its entirety with no changes. Requests to use any portion of the document (including text, graphics or photos) should be sent to permission@ndsuext.nodak.edu. Include exactly what is requested for use and how it will be used.

