

Ideas for Families

Materials for Reading, A to Z

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NAEYC encourages educators to share this list with families.

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THERE ARE MILLIONS OF WONDERFUL THINGS for children to read—some may be quite obvious to you, and others may not. Here are some ideas from A to Z.



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A—Alphabet and other concept books

Alphabet books are great for building alphabet knowledge and many other aspects of literacy. And there are many wonderful alphabet books. Read books for other concepts as well—numbers, shapes, colors, and more. There are hundreds of terrific titles to choose from and lots your child can learn.

B—Board books

For infants and toddlers in particular, board books—that is, books with rigid, unbendable pages—are a must. These books can stand up to most assaults from young children and are just fine for older children as well. The selection of board books available has grown a great deal, and you can now find many children’s classics in board book format.

C—Computer software

The National Association for the Education of Young Children has taken the position that computers can be beneficial to young children if used in thoughtful, developmentally appropriate ways (NAEYC 1996). We agree. And lots of wonderful reading material is available for children on the computer—computer storybooks (we especially like many of the Broderbund titles), electronic encyclopedias, and more. There is also lots of junk available, so be sure to choose carefully. *Children’s Technology Review* (childrensoftware.org) is a valuable resource, as are early childhood educators you may know.

D—Directions

Reading directions is something most of us do almost every day, and demonstrating it is a great way to show children that reading can be helpful. Make sure to read all or part of some directions out loud to your child. She may be especially interested in directions for things closely related to her, such as directions for putting together a toy or getting to a friend's house.

E—E-mail and other electronic texts

We know many young children who enjoy hearing e-mail messages, text messages, or other electronic texts read aloud. With your help, children can correspond with family and friends far away or use e-mail to make plans with friends nearby. Many children's book authors have e-mail addresses publicized online, as do politicians, celebrities, and other noteworthy people. We have even e-mailed Santa Claus! (Search "Santa e-mail" for Web sites.)

F—Flannel boards

Flannel boards are large, felt surfaces on which flannel pieces can be stuck and unstuck. Flannel board sets are available for retelling stories such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. You read the story one or more times and then invite your child to act out the story using flannel pieces that depict Goldilocks, each of the three bears, the chairs, the bowls of porridge, and so on. Flannel board sets are available from sources such as TeachChildren.com or homespunkids.com, or if you are really ambitious, you can make your own. Susan made one by sliding a piece of cardboard into an old flannel pillowcase.



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G—Guides

We have found that guides to a zoo, a park, a museum, and so on are great reading materials for children. Many children enjoy making connections between what they are seeing in the guide and what they will see, are seeing, or have seen at the actual location. Children also like helping you to navigate with the guide. Guidebooks to a city or other location you are visiting also appeal to young ones.

H—How-to books

How-to books tell children how to make or do something. There are how-to books for crafts, games, room decoration, cooking, and many more activities. Many of these books are too difficult for young children to understand and follow on their own, but some are designed for younger children. If not, you can still use them, providing lots of support. Of course, it makes little sense to read how-to books unless you are actually going to try to do the thing described, so get ready not only to read but to *do*.



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I—Informational texts

Informational texts convey information about the natural or social world—for example, telling about frogs or Mexico, how the body works, or where food comes from. Some people worry that these kinds of texts are too difficult for young children, but considerable research suggests that is not the case (Duke 2003). There are information books, designed for even very young children, on countless topics of special interest to them. Be aware, information books can be difficult to track down in libraries and bookstores. Sometimes they are intermingled with the picture books; other times they're integrated into the nonfiction section. But don't let this discourage you—they are worth the search!

J—Junk mail

Does junk mail drive you crazy? Hand it over to your child—she will likely love it! Many children are very curious about junk mail—What is it? Why did the sender send it? What does it say? These are fine opportunities for you to do a little selective reading aloud and a lot of explaining. Then let your child play with the mail. She may use it for all kinds of pretend play, from mail carrier to office aide to mommy or daddy. If you are still buried in mail, schools often welcome junk mail for use in their projects and pretend play as well.

K—Kitchen magnets

You probably remember the magnetic poetry fad from a while back. From a literacy perspective, that is one fad that never should have faded. Children may enjoy and benefit from playing with magnets and working with you to create poems, funny sayings, and other texts. The original magnetic poetry set may work, but you might also look for ones designed specifically for younger children, with larger tiles containing words that are more common and accessible (though ideally some words should be new to your child). See magneticpoetry.com for several kits for kids. Alphabet magnets are great too!

L—Library books

One of the most taken-for-granted assets in our country is our libraries. Libraries provide access to more reading material than we could read in a lifetime; they offer books on a vast array of subjects; and they're staffed with knowledgeable people to help you sort through the riches—all for free!

Help your child develop a lifelong habit by taking her to the library regularly and making library books and other materials a regular part of her reading diet.



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M—Magazines

Magazine reading is popular for adults, but often overlooked for children. Yet children, like adults, often love the format, freshness, and content of magazines. There are many magazines for young children—from *Babybug*, a board-book literary magazine for infants and toddlers, to *Your Big Backyard*, a National Wildlife Federation magazine for preschoolers. And magazine subscriptions make great gifts—they're the gift that keeps on giving!



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N—Novelty books

Let's face it, there are times when children want a little jazzing up in their books. Books that pop up or play music, that include puzzles or rattles, that come with necklaces or stickers, that include figurines or pipe cleaners, or whatever the enhancement, are appealing to many children. We wouldn't want these to be the only books a child has, but they can be a valued part of his collection.

O—Out-and-about books

Whenever possible, try to make connections between children's experiences—from running errands to taking vacations—and books read to them. There are many ways to connect books with out-and-about experiences.

P—Poems

Yes, young children can appreciate this art form if given the opportunity. Children may enjoy poems about topics close to home (as in *Mommy Poems*, a collection compiled by John Micklos Jr.), poetry about adventures, poems to make them laugh, poems to make them think, and more. There are books based on songs that are also poems, such as *Over in the Meadow*, by Ezra Jack Keats. If your child's book collection is weak on poetry, as many are, set a goal of acquiring three new books of poetry over the next year. We think you'll be glad you did!

Q—Quiz books, cards, and machines

Many texts ask questions or offer brainteasers that children love to solve, such as "What number do you get when you add your ears and your eyes?" (Klutz 2001). Melanie Walsh's *Do Monkeys Tweet?* asks silly questions children love to answer! Quiz cards and electronic quiz machines often ask preschoolers trivia or world knowledge questions. If your child enjoys being quizzed, include items like these in his reading material, though be sure he answers enough questions correctly to feel good about the experience.

R—Recipes and cookbooks

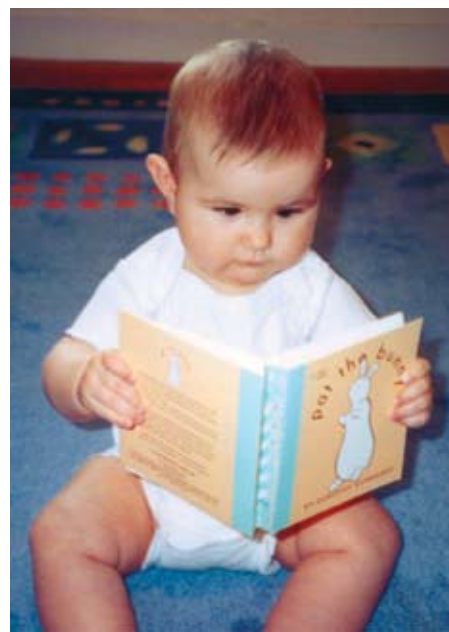
Cooking is a rich activity to engage in with children and one with many possibilities for literacy. Family recipes are wonderful to share with children because of the history that often goes with them, but there are great cookbooks to consider as well.

S—Storybooks

We could not forget storybooks! *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak, *The Cat in the Hat*, by Dr. Seuss, *Clifford: The Big Red Dog*, by Norman Bridwell—some children’s storybooks have been so loved for so long that they have become a part of our culture. For many, hearing beloved storybooks is one of the most memorable parts of childhood. So make sure storybooks are a part of your child’s daily experience.

T—Touch-and-feel books

Many infants and young toddlers love touch-and-feel books. *Pat the Bunny*, by Dorothy Kunhardt, is the best known such book, but there are now hundreds more. Some of our favorites include Dorling Kindersley’s Touch and Feel series, Matthew Van Fleet’s *Fuzzy Yellow Ducklings*, and the book *Feely Bugs: To Touch and Feel*, by David A. Carter.

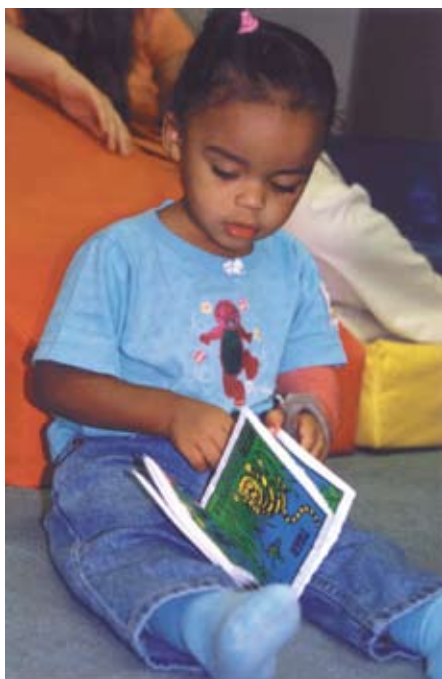


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U—Use-up books

Sometimes the right book is a “consumable” book, or a book that children can write in—a book of mazes or puzzles, a book that allows your child to contribute to the story, and so on.

Interestingly, while we often think of such books as being useless once they are used up, we have found many children like to keep and refer back to them.



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V—Vinyl books

A number of publishers make books out of vinyl or other plastics. These books work very well in the bathtub or anywhere your drooling darling might be.

W—Web sites

The Internet has many sites aimed at young children. Some, such as pbskids.org, include materials that appeal to nearly any child. Others appeal to only some children (for example, Nell’s daughter was a big fan of My Little Pony and hasbro.com/mylittlepony). We also read and explain material from sites not intended specifically for children if the site answers a question one of our children has asked, if it provides information about a trip we are about to take, or if it is otherwise relevant to our children’s lives. If your child asks a question for which you don’t have the answer—such as, “What is the difference between a dolphin and a porpoise?”—look up the answer online with your child. He or she may like the opportunity to type in the search terms as you spell them aloud, which provides great practice in letter recognition. Encourage

your child to appreciate the richness of the Web, but as you explore, help your child begin to become a critical consumer of material found there.

X—Maps and other reference materials

X marks the spot! Many children enjoy browsing maps, seeing where they or others live, following the route as they fly or ride in a car (consider highlighting it ahead of time), and even simply folding maps back up. Other reference materials are valuable too—when a word arises that your child does not know, when you need help explaining a concept, when a photo would help your child to understand, or when your child wants to know a fact such as how many people live in China, consult a reference book or electronic resource to help. In addition to showing how to locate the information you need, you provide a great model for how to use text to answer questions about the world.



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Y—You-make-it-yourself books

Some of the most treasured reading materials for many families are items they have made themselves—scrapbooks, albums, books you and your child have created together, and so on. If you make these books available to your child for reading aloud and browsing, you will likely find her going to them over and over again. (If you are concerned about wear and tear, have the books laminated at a local copy shop.)

Z—Zany books

Many young children love books that are a little zany—where spaghetti ends up on a character’s head, where toasters talk, where things wind up upside-down, backwards, or otherwise mixed up. While we want to be sure young children are exposed to serious, quality literature, we also let some silly, wacky, and not-so-serious books into the fold, as these are very often popular with children (and sometimes their parents too!).

Don’t be concerned if you don’t own materials in all of these categories. Having just some can help your child, and having more is something to work toward. And this need not cost you a fortune. A number of the materials on the list come at no or very low cost (for example, directions, junk mail, and recipes), and there are even ways to get books at low or no cost.

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