

## Early Reading



Learning to read (and write) is a [complex social and cultural activity](#). Over time, young children learn to create and understand meanings from pictures, symbols, words and eventually print. They gradually develop early reading through their [talk, internal speech](#), symbolic play and early writing.

### Environmental print

From birth, children actively seek to make meaning from the many different representations of language that surround them (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky 1986; Daniels, 2014), so it is important that early years settings reflect children's lives. This means that resources should include different everyday objects that children can use in role play and imaginary games, as well as familiar images and texts from their wider worlds. These might include materials such as empty packaging from children's favourite foods, household and personal items, signs, labels, and digital platforms as well as printed text.



Practitioners can draw children's attention to symbolic meaning in the materials, signs, print and books around them as they play. When taking trips out into the community, practitioners might talk about the symbols, print and meaning in the environment, from road signs and street names to shop symbols, letters and words.

### Pictures as symbols



Images and illustrations, such as in picturebooks, often symbolise things in the real world (objects, people, creatures or scenes). Babies initially explore pictures in books with all their senses (by mouthing, smelling, banging). As their experiences grow, they begin to understand images as symbolic (Krishnan and Johnson, 2014), such as associating a picture of a duck with ducks in the park. So it is important for babies to have opportunities to explore a wide range of board and cloth books and to talk about the images they find in them.

### Shared Book Reading / illustrations

Reading books and stories with babies and children is important for language and literacy development. Shared book reading is a perfect opportunity to develop knowledge about the world, empathy and shared understandings. Creating warm and shared meaningful experiences with books from the earliest age matters. Even the youngest babies can engage joyfully and purposefully in shared reading, at home and in early care and education settings.

Both fiction and non-fiction books and other texts can be explored. Through adopting a dialogic approach, the skilled practitioner supports children to use their developing language for thinking to make connections and ask questions.



Book sharing experiences are enhanced when practitioners know the book well and share authentic pleasure in the words and pictures. Developing a repertoire of favourite books is a great and enjoyable way for practitioners to underpin their skills in supporting early reading.

[Pictures can tell](#) us more about a story than the words alone. Taking time to look carefully, wonder aloud and comment together creates joyful and co-created ideas. This supports children to make inferences and extend their understanding. It is a perfect opportunity to model using new words in the book for children to learn.

There are a few key strategies when sharing books that will help children with their engagement and understanding:

- Allow pauses for children's thinking time as they consider their responses to pictures and the words.
- Use actions, vary your volume and intonation to emphasise meaning. Create soundscapes with your voice or with materials and instruments to support meaning and use different voices for different characters. Encourage children to join in with you.
- Listen carefully to children's responses, acknowledge and value all their comments and tune into their line of thinking.
- [Try to use prompts such](#) as 'I wonder why/ what' rather than asking closed questions.
- Allow children to return to pages and pictures they are interested in so they can explore ideas in depth.
- Sharing books doesn't have to be quiet or a seated experience. Provide opportunity to explore and act out texts in active ways indoors and outdoors with a variety of materials.
- Provide opportunities and resources for children to revisit and explore favourite stories alone and with their friends, using props and puppets.

## **Reading for Pleasure**



[Finding joy in reading](#) underpins both the motivation to engage with literary activities and the process of learning to read; it is a desired outcome in itself. Developing positive emotional connections with reading begins with babies' earliest experiences of shared reading. Making time for cosy and playful one-to-one book sharing in baby rooms lays the first foundations of reading.

Making story times active and engaging will support toddlers and young children to sustain attention and engage for longer as well as deepen their understanding of narratives. Get up and move, make big and small actions that children can join in with, and have fun.

Have some favourite texts that you [return to again and again](#) with actions, sounds, and props, to give children secure knowledge of books and stories and feel confident. A 'core books' approach to the curriculum that allows children to get to know a few titles in real depth across the year can support this well.

### **Phonological awareness**

The roots of phonics, being able to decode the patterns of sounds in printed words, lie in children's developing capacity to distinguish and play with environmental, instrumental, spoken sounds and language. Young children and babies need lots of practice and meaningful experiences to begin to notice and manipulate the range of sounds all around their world. Their developing brains need lots of opportunity to hear and explore sounds, rhythms and oral language to support their dexterity in finding and making patterns of sound indoors and outdoors.

Very young babies notice sounds around them and need interested adults to tune into what they notice and give shared attention to what they hear. The world is full of sounds, tuning in with babies and children to what they hear and pointing out familiar and unfamiliar sounds that you hear helps them notice and attend to the sounds around them. To help children develop their phonological awareness, the following strategies are helpful:

- provide experiences for babies and children to make sound patterns in indoors and outdoors, including with musical instruments.
- Singing songs gives children experience in listening and joining in, breaking down words into units of sound or syllables, and hearing the rhythms of words, such as 'Hump-ty Dump-ty' and 'Merr-i-ly, merr-i-ly, merr-i-ly, merr-i-ly, gent-ly down the stream.' Clapping along with the rhythms of songs and words will help children break down units of sounds in spoken words.
- Choose books that encourage children to hear and make sounds in words and to notice and explore rhythm and rhyme, such as 'Tanka Tanka Skunk', 'Chicky Chicky Chook Chook', 'The Train Ride', 'Fast & Slow', 'Whatever Next'.
- Create opportunities for children to explore the complex concept of rhyming syllables at the end of spoken words. They will need lots of experiences to hear and play with spoken rhymes in songs and poems and as their confidence grows, practitioners can encourage children to make up their own rhymes – [silly rhymes](#) can be very popular!
- As children become older and aware of letters and corresponding sounds, draw attention to similarities in initial sounds in conversation, stories and non-fiction books. Point out that some letters can represent more than one sound, such as 'G' in goat and giraffe.
- As children grow in confidence hearing and playing with sounds in words and syllables, adults can playfully introduce simple oral blending and segmenting experiences into daily routines and games. 'Let's z-i-p up your coat, zzzzz i-p!' or "have you seen my p-e-n?". Keep it simple and meaningful at first and build up to oral blending and segmenting games that will help them embed their new skills to support their later learning about phonics as they progress through the school's phonics scheme.

## **Phonics**

Phonics is a way of teaching children how to read and write. It involves matching the sounds of spoken words with individual letters or groups of letters.

Synthetic phonics schemes start with the simplest most common Grapheme (letter) Phoneme (sound) Correspondences (GPCs) and systematically teach and add more, building the complexity of written words.

Whilst children can learn some familiar and meaningful GPCs before they start school, there is no research to suggest that rushing ahead with phonics has any benefits. Early reading skills benefit more from time in nursery spent on developing communication and language skills, playing with rhymes and rhythms, and enjoying stories and books in print and digital media.

For the great majority of children in Reception Classes, systematic phonics instruction is beneficial. Research evidence shows that it can enable children to make better progress than unsystematic or no phonics instruction (Torgerson et al.,

2019). A range of systematic synthetic phonics programmes are available <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/phonics-choosing-a-programme>.

It is important that children find purpose and meaning in learning phonics so that it is not an abstract activity. Alongside a systematic scheme, children will benefit from plenty of playful and meaningful experiences to use their developing phonics for reading.

Adults might create simple treasure hunts and clues using early phonics sounds. They might spot or create decodable moments in interactions in play such as reading signs, labels, shopping lists and instructions, or they may design games with decodable instructions that children can read themselves using their phonics. To help children develop phonics knowledge, the following strategies are helpful:

- Model reading when tuning into children’s play and draw attention to new sounds and blending.
- When reading aloud to children, sometimes draw attention to new words or sounds they have been learning.
- Read a simple text with children that they can sound out using their phonics knowledge .

Always remember that phonics is used for reading, not just sounding out.

## References

Bruner, J. (1990) *Acts of Meaning*. London: Harvard University Press.

Daniels, K. (2014) Cultural agents creating texts: a collaborative space adventure. *Literacy*, 48 (2) 103-111

Krishnan, S. and Johnson, M. (2014) A review of behavioural and brain development in the early years: the “toolkit” for later book-related skills. Available at; <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/globalassets/resources/research/krishnan--johnson-2014-full-report-a-review-of-behavioural-and-brain-development-in-the-early-years-the-toolkit-for-later-book-related-skills-.pdf>

Torgerson, C., Brooks, G., Gascoine, L. and Higgins, S. (2019) Phonics: Reading policy and the evidence of effectiveness from a systematic “tertiary” review. *Research Papers in Education*, 34 (2), 208-238.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986) *Thought and Language*. London: The MIT Press.

## Online Resource Links

1. <https://dyslexiaida.org/scarboroughs-reading-rope-a-groundbreaking-infographic/>
2. <https://clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/useful-resources/power-picture-books-anjali-patel>
3. <https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/silly-rhymes>
4. [https://cdn.ourfp.org/wp-content/uploads/20210205163244/Book\\_Chat\\_Guide.pdf](https://cdn.ourfp.org/wp-content/uploads/20210205163244/Book_Chat_Guide.pdf)
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=-qqnT9oajyY&feature=youtu.be>
6. <https://ourfp.org/supporting-rah/can-we-read-it-again-why-rereading-matters/>