

## **USING LITERATURE TO EXPLORE LANGUAGE AND STORIES**

Many parents of pre-school children are keen to help prepare their child for school and for the important task of learning to read. Reading to their child is one of the most rewarding and useful things that parents can do. Picture books are a wonderful resource not only for the enjoyment and sharing of ideas, but also for developing attention, listening skills, important early concepts about books and print and also the opportunity for incidental language learning.

### **USEFUL TIPS FOR READING TO YOUR PRESCHOOL CHILD**

- Choose books that reflect your child's their interests and experiences. Let them help you select the books for reading.
- Be patient with your child's questions. Remember that asking questions is how young children learn about the world.
- When reading stories choose books with a strong storyline and talk about what happened at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the story. Was there a problem in the story and how was it solved?
- Be prepared to add that little spark of imagination to create the right atmosphere - a few sound effects and character voices.
- Don't ask too many questions. Sometimes comments can be just as useful to encourage your child to talk and give their opinions. Put into words your own thoughts about the story, such as "I wonder why he did that." " I like the part where ... because ..."
- If the book that is chosen is a firm favourite and has been read many times before, try different ways of sharing the story - involve children in repetition of phrases or key parts of the story; close the book and 'remember' the story together; draw the best part of the story and talk about why it is the best; or act out the story using simple props or drawings of characters attached to icy-pole sticks.
- Gradually introduce your child to new or less familiar themes in stories. Remember, that it is through reading books, that we learn new vocabulary and are introduced to concepts and ideas beyond our immediate experience.

### **STORY BOOKS AND LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES**

Parents of preschoolers may like to try some of the following **language activities** centred around children's literature. The books mentioned, or others that are very similar, should be readily available at local libraries.

- **Rhyme**

*Each Peach Pear Plum - Janet and Allan Ahlberg.*

Read the rhyme on each double page. Children will have fun finding the nursery rhyme character hidden in the picture. Re-read the text several times gradually encouraging your child to complete the rhyming couplet. "Cinderella on the stairs, I spy the Three ...(bears)." Talk about how the words rhyme or end the same way. The text also follows a pattern that helps children "remember" who will appear on the next page. If children are unfamiliar with any of these characters this is an opportunity to follow up by talking or reading about them in other nursery rhyme books. Awareness of rhyme has been shown to be an important predictor of early literacy success.

- **I Spy with a difference**

*Treasure Hunt - Out and About. Puffin Books*

This is a hard cover book with lots of great photos of items grouped according to location - on the beach, at school, going shopping etc - however any similar book will do. To play this version of **I Spy**, think of a pictured item and then give your child a clue. For example - "I spy with my little eye, something that has red and white stripes", or "I spy with my little eye something that is made of paper." Don't forget to let your child take turns to give a clue.

- **Circular Stories**

*Are you my mother? Dr Seuss series*

A little bird has become lost and encounters numerous other creatures as he searches for his mother. Stories like this help children participate in story making. Take turns to role-play the baby bird, the mother and the other creatures. Pretend that the little bird still hasn't found its mother yet. Create and tell new episodes. Draw pictures to support this 'new' story.

- **What If?**

*The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by A. Wolf. by Jon Scieszka. Penguin Puffin. 1991*  
*Prince Cinders by Babette Cole. 1987. Harper Collins*

Both these books take familiar fairytales and add a twist -they change a key component or character to create a new story or perspective. Discuss how these stories are similar and yet different from the traditional tales of The Three Little Pigs and Cinderella. Use these books as starting points to play "**What If?**" focusing on other familiar stories. For example "What if Cinderella didn't want to marry the handsome prince? A further variation of this game is - "If I were Jack in the beanstalk (or whichever other character you choose) I would ...".

- **Sandpiper Publications**

Adele Wallis has produced a number of resources to support language development through activities and discussion based on readily available children's picture books. The **Oracy -Too Program** explores the theme and story structure of each book. As well as completing activity sheets children are encouraged to discuss, explain, describe and sequence. The **Friend's Talk Program** focuses primarily on language skills in the context of social interactions and friendships. The programs are suitable for all young children but will be particularly useful with children with language delay or those students at risk for literacy difficulties. The books are not included in the package so you will need to access each of these from your local library. Both programs come in a ring binder and cost \$33.

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## OTHER WAYS TO PROMOTE STORY TELLING

- **Pass the story**

This is a great activity for a long car trip. Start with Once upon a time there was (the traditional story beginning) then introduce the character. Each person then continues the story for 30 seconds at which time it is passed on to the next person. Don't forget to include the setting for the story as well as a problem that needs to be solved. Be prepared for the storyline to diverge and end in an unexpected way.

- **Create your own books**

Use family photos of events such as a birthday party or a trip to the zoo. Later when the photos are developed, sequence them and use them to dictate a story or retell events as they happened.

Other topic suggestions are - Things I really like.

My dog/pet - create an information book.

Alphabet book based on animals or actions.

- **Story Starters**

Use the following story starters to get you going on an oral story.

*When I was a tiny baby...*

*If I were an elephant I would ...*

*One day at school a strange thing happened ...*

*The little dog dug under the fence and looked out ...*



- **Stories out of the mouth**

Create stories featuring family members. Some of these stories may be about important or unusual real life family events, for example " The day Grandma fell off her horse." Other stories may be about family members in an imaginary situation, for example " Jenny went to Mars". Write the title of each story in a notebook and ask the children to illustrate. Children can then choose a favourite 'story out of the mouth' for bedtime story time.

- **Character Box**

Collect small interesting objects and place them in a decorated 'Character box', for example, a plastic spider, a cork with a face drawn on it, a tiny teddy, an action toy. Choose a character and use it as the basis for a story. You will need to model a story as you join in the fun.