

Creating a Literacy-Rich Environment

Dear Family,

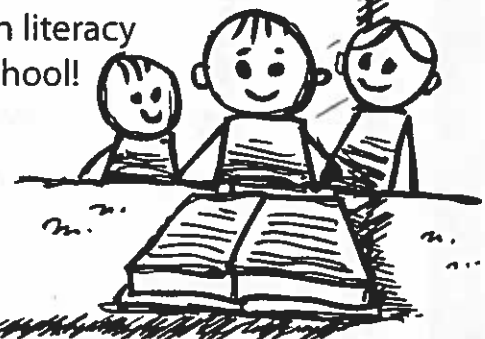
There are many things you can do at home to encourage literacy development. Setting up a literacy-rich environment in your home contributes to your child's reading and writing development. Try some of the following suggestions:

- Keep lots of children's books in your home. Check them out from the library. Buy them at a bookstore. Find them on sale at used bookstores and yard sales. Trade books with your friends and neighbors.
- Set up a library corner. This communicates that books are valuable and deserve a special place in your home.
- Take frequent trips to the library. Talk with your child about the kinds of books he or she likes to read and look for those books in the library.
- Read aloud to your child, or have a family member or friend read aloud to your child, on a daily basis. Find a comfortable spot in which to relax and enjoy a good book.
- Show interest in your child's daily activities—even activities that do not involve reading and writing.
- Encourage your child to write (or scribble). Have him or her write stories, thank-you notes, family announcements, etc. If your child does not yet "write" in the conventional sense, encourage him or her to draw pictures or experiment with the spellings of words.

Research suggests that children who engage in literacy experiences at home ultimately do better in school!

Sincerely,

RMS Learning Community



Development of Early Writing Skills

Dear Family,

Did you know that *you* are your child's first and most influential teacher? It's true. Just by observing your reading and writing behaviors in the home, your child is learning about the purpose of literacy. It's important for you to understand that writing development is a *process*, and you should allow him or her to experiment with writing in a variety of ways.

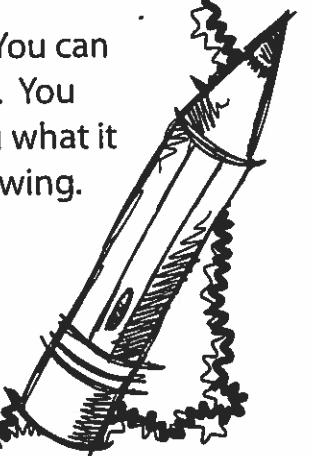
First of all, it is necessary to recognize that writing develops in stages. Children begin by drawing pictures. Then they begin to scribble. Soon, they begin to write letters or shapes that resemble letters. All of these stages are important and ultimately lead to a child's ability to spell and communicate through writing.

As you encourage your child to write at home, convey to your child that his or her attempts at writing are valued. While it may be tempting to correct the writing or tell your child how to spell each word, remember that "experimenting" is necessary for writing development. To further encourage your child's writing at home, try the following:

- Talk about the things you write. Mention that you are making a grocery list or sending an email to Grandma.
- Set up a writing area in your home. Include pencils, pens, markers, paper, cardstock, envelopes, etc.
- Encourage your child to "write" a thank-you letter. You can have him or her dictate the letter while you write it. You can also have your child draw a picture and tell you what it "says." Then you can write the words below the drawing.

Sincerely,

R.M.S. Learning Community



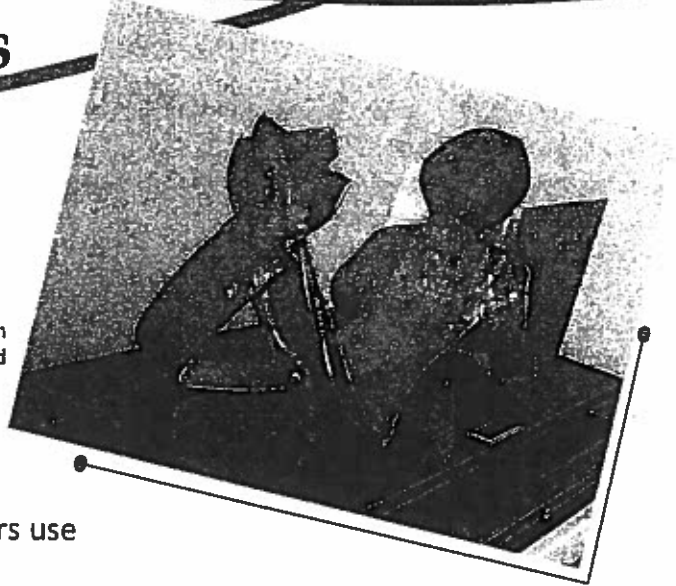
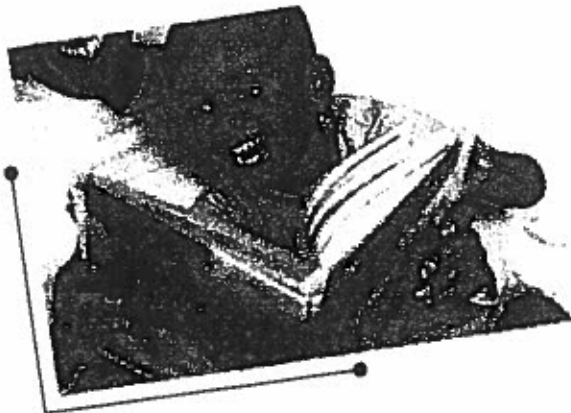
Raising Readers: Tips for Parents

NIU Literacy Clinic

What is Phonics?

Adapted from: Elish-Piper L. (2009/2010). Information and Ideas for parents about phonemic awareness and phonics. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 31(1), 52-54

Phonics is the relationship between letters and sounds. Readers use phonics to decode, or sound out, unknown words. For example, when a reader comes to a word he doesn't know, he can decode the word letter by letter such as in the example "big" where he would identify the sounds /b/ /i/ /g/ to read the word "big." Other words may have chunks or patterns that he can use to figure out unknown words. For example, when he comes to the word "jump" he may identify the sound /j/ and then the familiar chunk /ump/ that he knows from other words such as "bump," "lump", and "dump."



Children usually learn beginning sounds first, short vowels next, and then three-letter words such as "cat," "sit," and "map." Next, children learn about the silent "e" that comes at the end of words and makes a vowel a long vowel, meaning that the vowel says its own name such as /a/ in the word in "tape." Children also learn about other long vowel patterns as well as blends such as the letters /tr/ /br/ and /cl/.

Even if parents do not understand all of the phonics rules and patterns, they can still help their children develop phonics skills. Here are 10 fun, easy activities that parents and children can do to practice phonics skills at home.

What Can Parents Do to Promote Phonics at Home?

1. Read to and with your child as often as possible. Talk about words, letters, and sounds. For example, ask your child, "What words do you see on this page that start with the same letter as your name?" Or, ask, "What is the beginning sound in the word 'car'?" Or, point out, "Look, that word has the chunk /ip/ in it. What sounds does that chunk make?"
2. Make letters in fun ways such as in clay, play-dough, or sand and talk about the sound each letter makes and the sounds they make when they are combined.
3. Look for letters in your house or neighborhood. Point out and talk about the letters you see and the sounds they make as you read words on signs, labels, menus, and the TV.
4. Make words with magnetic letters and then add or change one letter to make a new word. For example, begin with the word "car" and add a /t/ to the end to make the new word "cart" then take off the /c/ and replace it with a /d/ to make the word "dart" and so on. See how many new words you and your child can make.
5. Have your child use phonics to help you look for items at the grocery store. Ask him to find the "corn" by looking for the word on the labels. Have your child read the label to make sure that he has found the right item.
6. Writing is a great way to practice phonics skills with your child. Have her help you write a shopping list, birthday card, or an email.

7. Practice chunks, sometimes called spelling patterns or rimes, with your child. This list of 37 chunks can be used to read and spell over 500 words! Point out these chunks as you read and write with your child. You can also write as many words as you can think of for each chunk. For example, if the chunk is "ack" you and your child might think of and write: "back," "hack," "jack," "pack," "rack," "tack," "black," "crack," and "snack." There are the 37 chunks:

ack	ain	ake	ale	all	ame
an	ank	ap	ash	at	ate
aw	ay	eat	ell	est	ice
ick	ide	ight	ill	in	ine
ink	ip	ir	ock	oke	op
or	ore	uck	ug	ump	unk



8. Go on a hunt for certain letters, sounds, or chunks. For example, look through a magazine, book, or ad with your child to find the letter /s/ or the blend /cr/ in words.
9. Play word games such as Boggle Jr., Scrabble Jr., Spill and Spell or What's Gnu. These games are fun for the whole family and can be purchased at most discount stores. Some libraries also have word games that can be checked out or used at the library.
10. The TV program *Between the Lions* on PBS can help your child learn and practice phonics skills. This show also has a free website with games, puzzles, and video clips at <http://pbskids.org/lions/>

Questions or
Comments?
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BUILDING A Reader At HOME

Explore Books!

Give your child an opportunity to explore books. Visiting a library or bookstore gives your child a chance to find topics and books that interest them.

Read, Read, Read!

Make sure to read for at least 30 minutes per day! Children can read independently, aloud to an adult, or back and forth with a partner.

Ask Questions!

- Predictions
- Characters
- Main Idea
- Problem
- Solution
- Retell Story
- Genre
- Moral

Make it Fun!

Reading shouldn't be a chore. Intentionally read with your child/discuss books but also research topics and do book activities together.

Be an Example!

Children learn by example, so let your child see you read whether it be a book, newspaper, cookbook, etc.

Pick Good Fit Books!

A book that is a good match for your child should meet the following requirements:

- Purpose for reading
- Interest
- Can they understand what they are reading?
Can they retell the story?
- Do they know most of the words?

For Beginning Readers:

- Point out and read words in natural settings – stores, streets, etc.
- Memorize sight words
- Visualize the story in your head
- Ask questions before, during, and after
Don't immediately tell an unknown word to your child. Instead, ask them to:
 - Sound out the word
 - Break the word into parts
 - Try a different vowel sound (long/short)
 - Use illustrations for clues
- Skip the word, re-read sentence, and go back – what word would make sense?

For Advanced Readers:

- Notice interesting, new vocabulary words, and make it a challenge to use them in conversation
- Read with expression
- Explore non-fiction books and their text features (diagrams, table of contents, etc.) along with other genres as well
- Compare and contrast books
- Discuss connections to literature
- Think of new titles for books
- Explore multiple books from the same author

question bookmark

{ask your child these questions
as you read}

read the title. what do you think
it's going to be about?



who are the main characters?



what do you predict will happen?



was your prediction correct?



what was your favorite part?



did you learn anything from
the story?



how many sight words can
you find?



did you learn a new word?



can you make a connection?



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teachers' picks

TOP 25 PICTURE BOOKS

"Where the Wild Things Are does just what a picture book should do," says New Jersey teacher Bob Krech. "Every word counts."



1. **WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE** by Maurice Sendak (HarperCollins) is "so compressed in its language and so exuberant in its pictures and so psychologically right," says author Jane Yolen, herself nominated for *Owl Moon*. "I return to it again and again." So do teachers! Max earned three times as many votes as a certain munching insect.

2. **THE VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR** by Eric Carle (Penguin).

3. **THE POLAR EXPRESS** by Chris Van Allsburg (Houghton Mifflin). For many of you this shadowy story is a winter must, up there with hot chocolate and mittens. Third-grade teacher Janice Wright explains: "It's magic."

4. **GOODNIGHT MOON** by Margaret Wise Brown (HarperCollins).

5. **LOVE YOU FOREVER** by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Sheila McGraw (Firefly). "I can't help myself, I cry every time I read it," says *Instructor* editor Hannah Trierweiler. Sniff. Pass the tissues.

6. **THE GIVING TREE** by Shel Silverstein (HarperCollins).

7. **SYLVESTER AND THE MAGIC PEBBLE** by William Steig (Simon & Schuster).

8. **MADLINE** by Ludwig Bemelmans (Penguin).



9. **THE LITTLE HOUSE** by Virginia Lee Burton (Houghton Mifflin).

10. **BLUEBERRIES FOR SAL** by Robert McCloskey (Penguin).

11. **THE SNOWY DAY** by Ezra Jack Keats (Penguin).

12. **STELLALUNA** by Janell Cannon (Harcourt). "Kids really connect to the message," wrote first-grade teacher Laurie Foote. What higher praise could a book receive?

13. **IF YOU GIVE A MOUSE A COOKIE** by Laura Numeroff, illustrated by Felicia Bond (HarperCollins).

14. **THE OTHER SIDE** by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by E.B. Lewis (Penguin).

15. **OWL MOON** by Jane Yolen, illustrated by John Schoenherr (Penguin).

16. **THE SNOWMAN** by Raymond Briggs (Random House) is the only wordless tale on our list.

17. **THE MYSTERIES OF HARRIS BURDICK** by Chris Van Allsburg (Houghton Mifflin).

18. **MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS** by Robert McCloskey (Penguin).



Anita Silvey, author of *100 Best Books for Children*, cherishes McCloskey's "subtle economy in text and art."

19. **SKIPPYJON JONES** by Judy Schachner (Penguin). This 2003 story of a mischievous cat has the distinction of being the newest teacher pick.

20. **NO, DAVID!** by David Shannon (Scholastic).

21. **THE KEEPING QUILT** by Patricia Polacco (Simon & Schuster).

22. **THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD** by Watty Piper, illustrated by George & Doris Hauman (Penguin). Will the real Watty Piper please stand up—and accept our hurrahs? (It's a pseudonym for the original publisher; the author is disputed.)

23. **THE MITTEN** by Jan Brett (Penguin). Second-grade teacher Donna Thaggard echoed many voters when she said "any book by Brett" is bound to be an instant favorite.

24. **GREEN EGGS AND HAM** by Dr. Seuss (Random House). Thank goodness the good doctor accepted a bet that he couldn't write a story using only 50 words. As *Instructor* editor Jennifer Prescott sums up in only five words: "I do so like it!"

25. **CURIOUS GEORGE** by H.A. and Margret Ray (Houghton Mifflin).



1. **CHARLOTTE'S WEB** by E.B. White (HarperCollins). Some pig, indeed. Monica Edinger, fourth-grade teacher and author of *Using Beloved Classics to Deepen Reading Comprehension*, calls *Charlotte's Web* "the great American children's novel...beginning with that remarkable first sentence 'Where's Papa going with that ax?'"

2. **BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA** by Katherine Paterson (HarperCollins).

3. **HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE** by J.K. Rowling (Scholastic). When the NEA surveyed teachers on kids' books in 1999, Harry Potter had yet to cast a spell. Now the whole world is hooked!

4. **THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE** by C.S. Lewis (HarperCollins).

5. **HOLES** by Louis Sachar (FSG).

6. **THE GIVER** by Lois Lowry (Random House), makes kids think. "It's wonderful for discussing politics," says brave teacher Jennifer Kopp.

7. **BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE** by Kate DiCamillo (Candlewick).



8. **TALES OF A FOURTH GRADE NOTHING** by Judy Blume (Penguin).

9. **A WRINKLE IN TIME** by Madeleine L'Engle (FSG). Jennifer Roy, author of *Yellow Star*, says her childhood fave "makes math, science, and philosophy appealing." Really.

10. **FRINDLE** by Andrew Clements (Simon & Schuster).

11. **CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY** by Roald Dahl (Random House).

12. **JUNIE B., FIRST GRADER (AT LAST!)** by Barbara Park (Random House).

13. **WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS** by Wilson Rawls (Random House).

14. **TUCK EVERLASTING** by Natalie Babbitt (FSG). Snag this idea from Jane Yolen: "I use the opening in writing classes as an example of sheer beauty."

15. **HARRIET THE SPY** by Louise Fitzhugh (Random House).

16. **RAMONA QUIMBY, AGE 8** by Beverly Cleary (HarperCollins).

17. **LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE** by Laura Ingalls Wilder (HarperCollins).



18. **FROM THE MIXED-UP FILES OF MRS. BASIL E. FRANKWEILER** by E.L. Konigsburg (Simon & Schuster).

19. **MANIAC GAGEE** by Jerry Spinelli (Little, Brown).

20. **THE SECRET GARDEN** by Frances Burnett.

21. **RUBY HOLLER** by Sharon Creech (HarperCollins).

22. **ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY** by Mildred D. Taylor (Penguin).

23. **ANNE OF GREEN GABLES** by L.M. Montgomery.

24. **FREAK THE MIGHTY** by Rodman Philbrick (Scholastic).

25. **A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS** by Lemony Snicket (HarperCollins). We can't believe it's over either. □

TOP 25 CHAPTER BOOKS

"I can never read the chapter where Charlotte dies," second-grade teacher Jennifer Kopp admits. "I use a recording of E.B. White reading that part."

