

Reading with preschoolers

LEANNE WILLIAMS

Mem Fox advocates reading with children for 10 minutes a day, which roughly equals three books. If you read 3 books a day to your child from birth, they would have heard around 5000 stories by the time they reach the age of five. Even if you read half that many, or a third, that is still a wonderful amount of sharing, bonding and learning that is taking place.

The benefits of reading to children are many:

- The human brain is most open to environmental influences in the first few years of life with 75% of brain development occurring between birth and the age of four.
- Research tells us that children whose parents read to them when they are young learn to speak, read and write more easily.
- Young children need lots of special one on one time with their parents and carers. In these busy times, reading together is a simple and enjoyable way to take time out from hectic schedules and bond with your children.
- Books can help children discover the world around them. There might not be that many dinosaurs roaming the streets but there are plenty in books!
- Story time can be one of the most rewarding moments you can spend with a child and one that both of you will treasure for years to come.
- What preschoolers know before they enter school is strongly related to how easily they learn to read when they start school.

What do preschoolers need to know

Imagine learning to read is like building a house. You would not try and build the walls without first laying strong foundations. Emergent literacy skills are the strong foundations of reading. Children need to have these early skills before they can learn to read. Emergent literacy skills include:

- Being able to recognise and name letters of the alphabet
- General knowledge about print, for example, which is the front of the book and which is the back, how to turn the pages of a book and that (In English) we read from top to bottom and left to right.
- The ability to identify and manipulate sounds, also called phonological awareness.

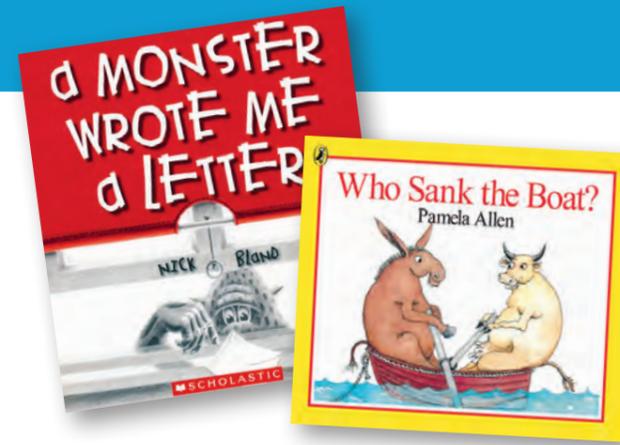
Developing pre-reading skills

Sharing a book with a pre-schooler is a great opportunity to help develop their emergent literacy skills. Here are some of the things you can do when you are reading with children:

1. Read the title of the book and encourage your child to predict what the book is going to be about.
2. Look at who the author and illustrator are. Do you know any other books by the same people? Make a list of favourite authors and illustrators to look for at the library or bookshop.
3. When you read to your child, run your finger under the words from time to time as you read them. This will teach him that you read from top to bottom and left to right.
4. Ask questions about the story, but make sure there is no right or wrong answer.
5. Play I Spy with a book. Have fun finding:
 - The letter that your child's name starts with.
 - All the words that begin with the letter . . .
 - The name of the character in the book
 - As your child gets older you could try and find every letter of the alphabet

These games work best with books that have simple, bold text.

At this age the most important thing to develop is a love of reading. Don't make each story time a lesson, read just for the fun of it!



What book do preschoolers like

- You know your child best. Be guided by their interests. If they are mad about trains, read books about trains. If they are spending their days hunting for fairies, read books about fairies.
- All children love predictable books, books that have a pattern, a predictable plot or lots of repetition. These books are a great choice for pre-schoolers as they can guess what is going to happen next and start 'reading' them.
- Our favourite books for preschoolers have one or more of the following:
 - An interesting story – *Who Sank the Boat* by Pamela Allen
 - Humour - *My Dad Thinks He's Funny* by Katrina Germein and Tom Jellett
 - Suspense - *A Monster Wrote Me A Letter* by Nick Bland
 - Familiar content - *Wanted: The Perfect Pet* by Fiona Robertson
 - Characters they can relate to - *You Must Be Joking* by Mike Dumbleton and Greg Holfeld
 - Interesting illustrations that they can explore on their own *Alison Lester's abc* by Alison Lester

Extending the book experience

As adults, there are usually two main reasons that we read – for pleasure or for information. Both of these require us

to understand what we have read. In reading terms, this is commonly known as comprehension. For children to become readers and to love books they need to understand what is being read to them. There are many fun ways to help develop children's comprehension:

- Pick a story that you know really well and act it out. Try a favourite fairy tale, children will love being one of the three billy goats trip trapping over the trolls bridge.
- Make puppets of the characters in the story and use them to retell the story. You can make a simple puppet by drawing a picture, cutting it out and sticking it onto a pencil.
- Take the theme of the book and incorporate the story into your child's play. These ideas are based on the books listed above.
 - Give your child an old towel to use as a cape like the character in *You Must Be Joking*
 - Put a plastic container and some plastic animals in the bath to see who sank the boat.
 - Go an alphabet treasure hunt, inspired by *Alison Lester's abc*
 - Use paints, pencils or recycled materials to create your very own monster. You could then even write him a letter.
 - Visit the local pet store and then make your own wanted poster for a perfect pet.
 - Introduce your child to simple jokes.
- Print out a free activity from The Little Big Book Club website. We have more than 100 downloadable activities based on our featured books: www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au

The preschool years are an important time in developing a lifelong love of reading so try and make the time to read a book (or three) every day.

WIN A BOOK!

Would you like to win a copy of *Who Sank the Boat*, *My Dad Thinks He's Funny*, *A Monster Wrote Me A Letter*, *Wanted: The Perfect Pet*, *You Must Be Joking* or *Alison Lester's abc*, courtesy of The Little Big Book Club? To enter, fill in this form and post to South Kids Little Big Book Club competition, 37 Fullarton Road, Kent Town SA 5067. Entries must be received by **Monday 15 August**.

Prize winners drawn manually. Draw conducted on 15 August. Winners notified by email. Books to be picked up from above address.

Tell us: How much time do you spend reading with your kids each day? _____

Your name: _____

Child's name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email address: _____

Child's age: _____