

In advance of reading first words, there is so much pre-reading learning that needs to take place!

For very young children, or those with special educational needs and disabilities, it's important that you think about how best to interest children in the concept of 'books' so that when the time comes for formalising their skills, they are truly engaged.

It is never too early to begin sharing books with your child. In the initial stages, the process is more about physical closeness, warmth, soothing and ultimately building relationships. As a child develops, they will generally be more interested in the visuals and increasingly the textures and 'feel' of books.

The introduction of the 'That's not my...' series of books has been instrumental in changing the mindset of what books for very young children and those with additional needs can achieve; selling over 20 million copies worldwide!

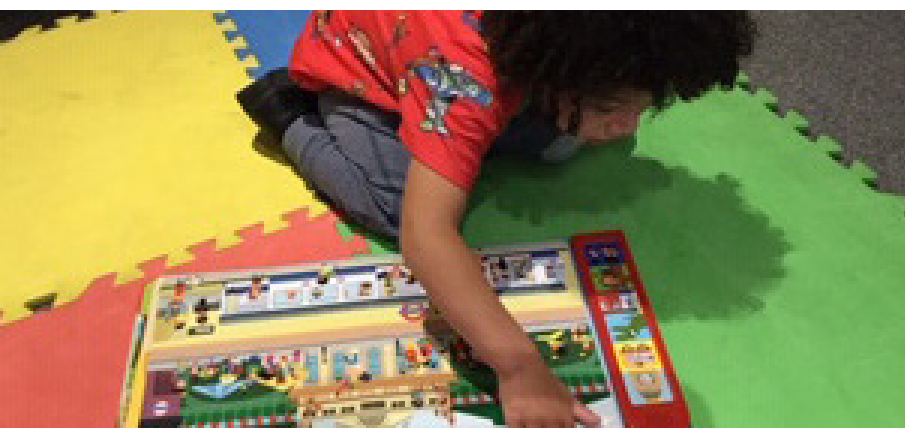
Children will likely go on to enjoy listening to short stories, and will perhaps get involved by turning the pages. They may ask you to read the same book hundreds of times! It's sometimes hard for us to grasp how a child doesn't become bored of the same story, but it's a useful reminder of the importance of repetition in learning!



How can we engage children in story time?

The best responses come from stories that have never been written down, because you're making them up as you go along! The concept is simple. You know what makes your child laugh. You know what makes them excited, you even know what might seem a bit scary to them. If you play your cards right, for the next 5-10 minutes this little one will be hanging on your every word as you spin your yarn! You can learn from your child's response and we take your story down different paths too! Admittedly the thought of doing this strikes fear into some people: 'I could never do that!' being a common response. Like most aspects of living or working with preschoolers, it's important to try not to feel embarrassed. If you tune into the child's enjoyment instead, everything becomes a lot easier and more natural!

As long as you are engaging the child you are with then you're doing something right. To give a preschool child a love of storytelling will hopefully mean that reading becomes a lifelong pleasure!



Sensory Stories

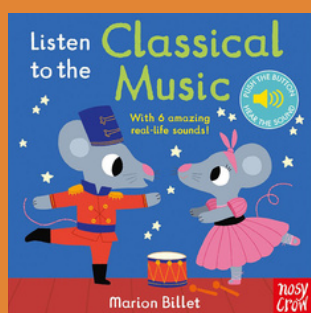
Sensory stories provide more than just visual and auditory stimulus. Texture in books is one thing, but imagine how much fun a story about rain would be if you were also covering your child with water from a sprayer? Or how much more interesting would a story about baking be if the ingredients were actually there to smell and taste? The best bit is, you don't need to wait around for the perfect rain or baking themed story to land, just create your own! Let your imagination run free; think of your child's interests, what would they really like to hear?

Story Boxes

A story box can be made from a decorated shoe box. Pop in a few items that could be used to prompt storytelling (such as a feather, a piece of interesting wood or a key) and let your imagination do the rest! Change the items in the box frequently to keep stories exciting.

Musical Books

There's nothing new about books that make sounds, but improved technology means that they no longer need to take the same form as they used to! This is a great example:



Each page has imagery related to a famous piece of classical music, and the little foil buttons to activate the songs are very subtle within the page. You can start pressing the buttons for your child, then challenge them to activate the music themselves. Musical books are also brilliant for learning cause and effect and developing early cognition skills.

Personalised Stories

This is where we consider a child's interests and create a storybook just for them. The best starting point for personalised stories is familiar photographs. Very young children and those with additional needs are massively interested in the people who are closest to them. There doesn't even need to be a storyline, the book could just be called 'All About Me' or 'This Is My Daddy'. You could add photos, familiar smells, materials to feel (the story might have a bag alongside it that you pull items from). Laminating pages and creating a physical "book" could be a good way to introduce page turning too. Alternatively, you can just sit down together and look at some familiar photographs and talk about the people or things that are in them. Often children just want to hear the calmness of your voice as you sit together, even if they don't understand the actual words.

Massage stories

This brilliant concept works really well for children with significant learning needs, particularly children who find it hard to sit still for a book or have lots of energy. The storyteller uses repetitive movements on the child's body as they tell the story, and the calming nature of the massage means that children are often able to sit for longer than normal.