RHYMERS ARE READERS
The name for the ability to notice and work with the sounds in language is phonological awareness. Young children who have phonological awareness notice, for example, when words begin or end with the same sound—that bag, ball, and bug all begin with the sound of b; that words can rhyme; and that sentences are made up of separate words. Research shows that, how quickly children learn to read often depends on how much phonological awareness they have when they begin kindergarten.

It is important for young children to be able to:
- Repeat rhyming songs and poems, identify rhymes, and generate rhyming words when playing a rhyming game.
- Recognize the common sounds at the beginning of a series of words (alliteration).
- Isolate the beginning sounds in familiar words.

Here are some things that you can do to help children learn about the sounds of spoken language:
- Choose books to read aloud that focus on sounds, rhyming, and alliteration.
- Have the children sing or say a familiar nursery rhyme or song. Repeat it several times, raising your voice on words that rhyme. Then have the children join in, saying the rhyming words with you.
- Invite the children to make up new verses of familiar songs or rhymes by changing the beginning sounds of words.


Check out these books from your local library and read with your child:

- **Rhythm and Rhyme Children’s Books**
  - Dr. Seuss books
  - Mrs. McNosh and the Great Big Squash, by Sarah Weeks
  - Mrs. McNosh Hangs Up Her Wash, by Sarah Weeks
  - Is Your Mama a Llama? by Deborah Guarino
  - Snuggle Wuggle, by Jonathan London
  - Knock at the Door and Other Baby Action Rhymes, by Kay Chorao
  - Silly Sally, by Audrey Wood
  - The Itsy Bitsy Spider, by Iza Trapani
  - I'm a Little Teapot, by Iza Trapani
  - Mary Had a Little Lamb, by Iza Trapani
  - Row, Row, Row, Your Boat, by Iza Trapani
  - Classic Rhymes and Verses, by Eric Kincaid

- The Real Mother Goose
- Old MacDonald, by Rosemary Wells
- Bingo, by Rosemary Wells
- The Itsy Bitsy Spider, by Rosemary Wells
- The Bear Went Over the Mountain, by Rosemary Wells
- If You Were My Bunny, by Kate McMullan
- Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, by Bill Martin, Jr.
- Time for Bed, by Mem Fox
- The Eensy-Weensy Spider, by Mary Ann Hoberman
- Miss Mary Mack, by Mary Ann Hoberman
- Teddy Bear Teddy Bear, by Michael Hague
- Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed, by Eileen Christelow
- There’s A Hole in the Bucket , by Nadine Bernard Wescott
- Do Your Ears Hang Low? by Pamela Cote
- The Lady with the Alligator Purse, by Nadine Bernard Westcott
- So Many Bunnies, by Rick Walton
- Hand Rhymes, by Marc Brown


**TALK, SING, READ**

Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers need to have parents and caregivers do three simple things to help them learn to read later in life. These three things are “guaranteed” to help a child to grow ready to learn in school and to have a desire to read. These three things are **TALK, SING, and READ**.

Using these ideas throughout your daily routines, (bathing, mealtime, playtime, washing, etc.) will stimulate your child’s language.

**Tune in and talk slowly.** Tune into your child’s play, conversation, and thoughts. Listen to what your child says, look at him or her and let them talk. If you are too busy at that moment, explain why you can’t listen now, and that you will talk later at a given time. Then remember to do it. Often our rate of speech is too fast for a young child to follow easily, so SLOW DOWN.

**Make talking fun and meaningful.** Praise your child for new words used, complete sentences, etc. Don’t force your child to display their speech for friends and relatives. Rather, bring up topics with a hint or two and let your child expand or participate if they choose. For example: “We had fun today at the park.”

**Look at your child and stoop down to your child’s eye level.** Adults frequently chat with children while completing tasks like dishwashing or grocery shopping. This is fine, but your talk will be most helpful if your child can see your face particularly your mouth while you speak.

**Talk about the here and now.** Talk about things as they are taking place or just after they happen, getting your child involved whenever possible. Events in the more distant past or future may be more difficult for your child to discuss or understand.

**Talk about what the two of you are doing.** Using short sentences, assume the role of commentator for your child and yourself. Talk about the objects your child is playing with. Ask questions or talk about the things you are doing as your child notices them.

**Repeat words often.** Pleasant repetition of the same word gives your child many chances to listen, understand, and try to imitate.

**Make your voice the center of attention by simplifying the environment.** Turn off the television, radio, and stereo, and spend a few minutes alone with your young child, away from distractions of older children and other adults. Fun activities include reading books, playing games, blowing bubbles, etc.

**Clarify the meaning of your child’s speech when it is unclear.** If your child says “Uh duh at dide?” while standing at the door pulling on the knob you can say, “Outside? I want to go outside?” This provides a correct model of the intended meaning so your child has a chance to listen to and imitate the words.

**Give feedback and expand.** Repeat what your child says, correcting incorrect sounds and words or adding new information. For example:

C: Kitty tree
A: Yes, the kitty’s in the tree.
C: Come
A: OK, I’ll come and see.

**Use self-talk.** Talk about what you’re doing. Describe every action, object, etc. Leave some pauses so your child can participate if desired.

**Use parallel talk.** This is the same thing as self-talk except you are describing and talking about what your child is doing. For example: “Oh, you drew a circle. It’s a big, round, red circle. It looks like a ball.”

**Name and point.** Name things for your child. Don’t be afraid to point out new words in your child’s vocabulary. Remember that children can usually understand more than they can say.

**Praise, praise, praise!** Make your child feel special! This also means you should be careful not to say anything negative about your child when he is present. Be positive and supportive. This cannot be overdone.

**SING with your child often during the day.** Children do not care if you cannot carry a tune. They just enjoy singing with you. The main thing is that you make singing an enjoyable experience with your child. Sing rhyming songs, silly songs, songs that repeat, made up songs, finger plays, nursery rhymes, poems, clapping for syllables, pattern books, and emphasis on words that begin the same.

Songs and rhymes provide comforting rhymes in children’s early lives and also expose kids to gorgeous forms of language. They are a natural extension to the heartbeat of the mother and the rhythmic rocking of a child in loving arms or in a cradle. You can read, recite, chant, or sing in a soft, low voice whenever a child is sleepy or fretful, and they’re also fun to say and learn when children are wide awake and happy.

From songs, children learn words, sentences, rhythm, theme, and repetition, all of which they’ll find later in books they read. Kids who can’t recognize the fact that two words such as bed and Fred-and there are many such kids-rhyme have a hard time learning to read. Those who can rhyme are able to make more inspired and more correct guesses about what a particular word might be when they are reading.

**Purdue University Speech/Language Pathology Early Language Program**

Rhymers will be readers: it’s that simple. Experts in literacy and child development have discovered that if children know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they’re four years old, they’re usually among the best readers by the time they’re eight.

The importance of getting songs and rhymes into children’s heads can’t be overestimated. This sounds easy enough to achieve, but it’s surprising and depressing to discover how many children come to school these days without even the most basic rhymes in their heads.

*Fox, Mem, Reading Magic Why Reading Aloud to our Children will Change Their Lives Forever, Orlando: Harcourt, 2001*