



Enjoying Story Time: Ages, Stages & Tips



Preschoolers who are read to at home or in preschool learn many things that will help them become good readers later in school. They learn to understand how to structure stories and narratives, they learn about different styles of books (e.g., fiction, nonfiction), they learn about concepts and functions of print and -- most important of all -- they develop positive attitudes towards books and reading.

This handout provides information on the stages of development in a child's ability to participate in storybook reading. In literate societies, children engage very early on in pleasurable interactions with caregivers in the context of storybook reading. All children, from birth onwards and including children with disabilities, can participate in storybook reading at some level. Use the information in this handout to discuss with your itinerant teacher how to choose books for groups of children at different developmental levels.

A Note of Caution

Children differ in their rates of literacy achievement. The stages described here are not precise but are meant to provide general guidelines and to generate a discussion between you and your itinerant teacher.

Selecting Books for Groups of Young Children

Good books for young children usually are those that have interesting language and lots of pictures. While some books work best for certain age ranges, a "good" book is ultimately what your listeners like! To gauge whether the book you have chosen is appropriate for your group, monitor your audience. Are they all looking at the book? Are they asking questions or making comments? Do they seem eager to



hear what happens next?

Two to Three Year Olds

At this stage, children like to point to pictures, label them and make comments. Most twos and threes will fill in words in familiar stories and some may even recite whole phrases. They love to hear the same story over and over again!

Twos and Threes might like books with:

- simple rhymes and predictable text.
- stories that reflect daily experiences, family life or familiar characters.
- flaps to lift and textures to touch.
- finger plays to act out or songs to sing.

Four Year Olds

At this age, children treat books as whole units. They rely heavily, however, on the pictures to sustain their interest in the story. After they have heard a story numerous times, they enjoy flipping through the pictures while retelling the story themselves.

Four year olds might like books that:

- tell imaginative stories such as fairy tales.
- are about going to school and making friends.
- are informational about things they have a special interest in, like animals.

Five Year Olds

Around 5 years of age, children become more interested in the twists and turns of the story's plot and thus need fewer pictures to hold their attention. They are also interested in specific aspects of printed words. For example they are interested in words that begin with the first letter of their names. They can memorize text and may run their fingers along the text as they "read" it.

Books five year olds might like:



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- counting books and alphabet books.
- books with simple text they can memorize or read.
- simple chapter books such as the *Little Bear* or *Frog and Toad* series.
- books with clever rhymes, poetry, jokes and riddles.

When choosing a book for a group of children, make sure it is one that even the child at the youngest developmental level will enjoy. Before reading the book to your group be sure to read it privately first. This allows you to concentrate on telling the story with enthusiastic expression and to check to see how your audience is responding. While reading the story you can tailor your comments and questions to the various developmental levels in the group. For example, to keep the younger child engaged ask them to point to some of the pictures and to keep the more sophisticated listeners engaged, involve them in looking at the print on some pages or in reciting parts of the story on their own. Remember, a good book for a group of children is one that captures everyone's attention and holds everyone's interest!

Notes:

Linder, T. (1999). *Read, play and learn: Storybook activities for young children*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Morrow, L.M. (1989). *Literacy development in the early years*. Englewoods Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.