

Early Literacy - Kindergarten and Grade 1

Reading and writing are the visual forms of listening and speaking. Children with atypical communication skills will face extra challenges in becoming literate. When you choose methods and materials to teach "Language Arts", the most important consideration is the child's language level - gaps in auditory/verbal language will also be seen in reading and writing. Once the child begins to learn the conventions of reading/writing, it is possible to "pull" the level of spoken language using visual materials.

Academic learning should be fun. For the activities and suggestions listed below to be effective, the child must be relaxed and happily engaged. Your goal is "learning with comprehension", not "compliance to a specific activity".

Beginnings of Literacy:

1. Letter Recognition and Sound/Letter Connection:

- magnet letters
- sensory alphabet games (eg. soap bubbles, sand, foam letters for the bath, playdoh, finger paint)
- alphabet books
- "sound hunts" and other sound/letter games
- computer letter toys (eg. V-Tech)
- preschool and kindergarten computer games (eg. Jumpstart, variety of programs available now to match children's interests)

2. Words have Meaning:

- personal dictionary book
- photo albums with single word labels
- word cards to match to pictures and real objects
- label everything in your house
- use of word-cards to request favourite treats and toys (start with word/picture, then try word only - eg. menu on the outside of the fridge)
- point to words as you say them (watch child's eye gaze)

3. Book-Reading Conventions

- read together
- choose material based on special interests (eg. toy catalogues, books of favourite songs, photo albums, information books)
- can modify favourite topic books to match child's language level (eg. paste simpler text into book - use large font from computer word-processing program)
- develop "start at the front, pause on each page, finish at the back"

- use phrases like "once upon a time", "they lived happily ever after", "the end", "read again"
- use books which are "toy-like" and allow a physical response (eg. lift-the-flap, pull-tabs, push buttons)
- take advantage of times where your child is relatively stationary and focussed (eg. mealtimes, bathtimes) - choose or make books that can withstand the "elements" (lamination, Ziploc bags)
- use "listening books" (tape/book combinations - lots of these available at the public library)

4. Story Sequence and Understanding Cause/Effect:

- translate story into visual form (eg. comic-strip "storyboard")
- make "story boxes" and play out favourite stories
- fairy tales are well-suited to teaching story sequence, since they frequently repeat events and language phrases (eg. "I'll huff and I'll puff", "Run, run as fast as you can, you can't catch me I'm the gingerbread man")
- choose books that match favourite videos or computer programs (take advantage of well-learned visual sequences) - read them, and play them out
- play "what next?" - use visual support (can be drawing, or toys, or felt-board, or stickers, etc.)
- with well-known stories, play "what if?" (eg. what if the wolf was good, and the pigs were bad?)
- take pictures of common sequences of events in your child's life, then make books with simple text that matches the child's language level - play out "real-life" events using small character toys (this becomes the basis for "social stories")

5. Interactive "Story Play":

- you must fill in the "play" gaps, if your child is to develop literacy with meaning ("Floortime" books and videos are useful guides in how to do this step by step; also look at the Hanen website for useful materials)
- play out stories with "good guys" and "bad guys"
- play out stories with emotional themes
- may start with toys to match favourite movies or TV shows - start with known language sequences - then start to gently change the sequence of events (a child holds tight to "scripts" when language comprehension is weak and/or confidence is shaky - as your child becomes more comfortable in the interactive small character toy play, you can push the limits - be ready to back up when you hit signs of distress - your child can't learn in "panic mode" - this is a balancing act, and will vary with each individual child)

- use puppets and dress-ups to play out stories - your child may enjoy making home movies of the stories, or hanging a curtain and performing for the family
- you can take still pictures of your child dressed up and acting like different characters, and make a book about "pretending" (the difference between real and pretend can be a tricky concept to teach)

Reading with Meaning:

1. Modified Early Books

- use of "Kid Works Deluxe" (see handout)
- make personal books using photos (digital camera is useful) - text should match functional language level - use well-known and high interest events in the child's life
- modify commercial books on high-interest topics by pasting simpler text over the text in the book
- make books by cutting and pasting favourite items from catalogues and labels - again, make sure the text matches the child's language level
- pattern books (eg. "Brown Bear, Brown Bear", "The House that Jack Built", "Where's Spot?") are great for early reading - you can make additional books with the same structure, but different content (eg. "Mommy, Mommy, What do you see?")
- "rebus" books allow child to read pictures as words
- make your own tape/book combinations - this is especially useful for children who pay better attention to one voice than others (eg. child who can follow mother's voice, but not teacher's), and also for children whose attention is held better by music and intonation

2. Useful Computer Programs

- "Living Books" - since they are based on real published books, you can move from computer program to traditional book - the child's familiarity with the book (characters and plot-line) can decrease anxiety about approaching the paper version
- "Let's Go Read 1 & 2" (published by Edmark) - good for sound-letter connection, relationship of sound sequence to words, allows for feedback of child's verbal production (IBM speech technology)
- "Reader Rabbit" - variety of programs, with matching traditional books
- "Kid Works Deluxe"

3. Following Written Instructions

- word and picture directions for tasks (eg. "Kinder Krunchies" published by Discovery Toys)
- task checklists (school and home)

4. Checking Comprehension

- need to build in method for child to indicate comprehension
- depending on child's skill profile, you may have child use "cut & paste", pointing, stickers, drawing
- may want to modify "Reader Response" ideas from the primary classroom

Writing with Meaning:

1. Dealing with Fine Motor Delays

- allow fine motor to develop on child's own timetable
- don't "muddy" teaching of concepts by requiring a difficult motor response
- can use letter stamps (Sandra Hession Educational, 2255 Fox Cir, Ottawa K2B 7K5, 613-721-0126)
- magnet letters and letter tiles (Scrabble) to teach spelling
- word cards for sentence construction
- keyboard

2. Useful Computer Programs

- "Kid Works Deluxe"
- traditional word-processing program where pictures can be scanned and added to the story
- "Spellbound"
- "Story Weaver"

3. Use of Visual Formulation

- draw first (or use cut-outs or stickers to make a picture) - add language to visual - may also write a story that you have made up while playing with small character toys
- write to the picture, rather than illustrating the text
- you may need to "scribe" for the child, or write part and have them fill in other parts ("cloze" method)
- often get clearer more meaningful language when you work through this mode
- work on "What next?", cause-effect, story sequence