



THE READING CHAIR

All Interest Areas Need Books, So Spread Those Books Around

NURTURING EARLY LITERACY means more than having a library corner stocked with good books. Books can and should be sprinkled throughout the classroom interest areas so that they become an integral part of daily activities. Below are some suggestions for incorporating books into the curriculum. Most of the selections are for preschoolers. Teachers can adapt the suggestions for older and younger children.

Science (nature, discovery, investigations)

Learning about science includes discovering the natural world and understanding one's place within it. From taking walks to planting seeds, children learn through hands-on investigation, making discoveries about how things work. Books such as the ones listed here can encourage and expand this kind of concrete discovery.

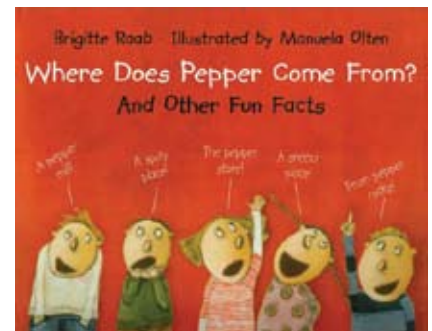
In fall, read *Leaf Man* to encourage children to see the complexity and creative possibilities in leaves that they collect. Read *An Egg Is Quiet* just before an animal comes to class for a visit. These books will not only give children answers but will inspire them to ask new questions. Teachers need not be science experts, but rather fellow investigators.

Where Does Pepper Come From? And Other Fun Facts

Written by Brigitte Raab. Illustrated by Manuela Olten.

This book asks eight intriguing questions, including, "Why do snails carry houses on their backs?" and "Why do sheep have curly wool?" The first answer to each question is always slapstick (snails like to go camping, sheep like to wear curlers in their hair). Children will love to participate in the rejoinder on the next page—No!—and to discover the real answers that follow (shells protect snails from predators and sun; curly wool traps air to keep sheep warm).

Humorous illustrations provide solid information. Not only is this book fun and factual, but it teaches children to make their own queries about natural mysteries around them. A question as simple as "Why is the sea salty?" may have a very interesting answer. The surprise ending reinforces the pleasure of scientific exploration.



Isabel Baker, MAT, MLS, is president of The Book Vine for Children, a national company dedicated to getting good books into the hands of preschool children and their teachers. Isabel has worked as a children's librarian and is currently a presenter on early literacy and book selection.

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Chair illustration by Diane Greenseid.

After reading this book to children, teachers can

- involve children in brainstorming questions about the natural world and coming up with possible answers. Add to the list whenever a new question arises. Then the children and teacher can explore additional print and Internet resources to find out the facts. Are any of the children's answers correct or close to correct?
- offer children interesting items to explore and wonder about, such as dryer lint (Where does it come from?), a bird's nest (How do birds build their nests? What makes them strong?), or orange peels (How long will it take them to dry? How much will the peels weigh today, tomorrow, next week?).

More science books

About Insects: A Guide for Children, by Cathryn Sill; illus. by John Sill.

An Egg Is Quiet, by Dianna Aston; illus. by Sylvia Long.

Dinosaur Bones, by Bob Barner.

In the Small, Small Pond, by Denise Fleming.

In the Tall, Tall Grass, by Denise Fleming.

Leaf Man, by Lois Ehlert.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle.

Blocks and building

Books related to construction and everyday life inspire children to re-create their physical surroundings. Blocks foster creativity, imagination, and empowerment. They allow children to envision a castle or a truck on their own, rather than relying on toy manufacturers to determine the details for them. Maps, road signs, and construction helmets are wonderful accessories in the block area, and books featuring these items are essential. Busy builders can also learn to use carpentry tools in an indoor or outdoor woodworking area.



Tools

Written and illustrated by Taro Miura.

This stunning book, with computer-made illustrations that look like paper collage, features more than 60 tools, from the common saw to the less familiar soldering iron. Children will enjoy the guessing-game format, in which they examine a set of tools before finding out who uses them. The carpenter uses a clamp, hammer, and chisel. The (female) doctor uses a stethoscope, syringe, and tweezers.

Miura's attention to detail creates a rewarding book. Without overwhelming the reader, he always offers something extra, like side-by-side comparisons of an open-end wrench and an adjustable wrench, a knife and a cleaver, a shovel and trowel. This book contains rich vocabulary and bold illustrations, all with seamless simplicity.

After reading this book to children, teachers can

- set up a woodworking area stocked with scrap lumber (available free at many home improvement stores and lumberyards) along with child-size carpentry tools, nails, screws, and sandpaper. Be sure to include safety goggles. Some teachers offer Styrofoam blocks before children move on to wood.
- invite a representative from the local home improvement store to visit the classroom to talk with the children about what different tools are used for and to reinforce safety tips. Children could make a list of questions to ask before the visit; follow up with additional questions that arise during and after the visit.

More books about blocks and building

City Signs, by Zoran Milich.

Houses and Homes, by Ann Morris.

Mike Mulligan, by Virginia Lee Burton.

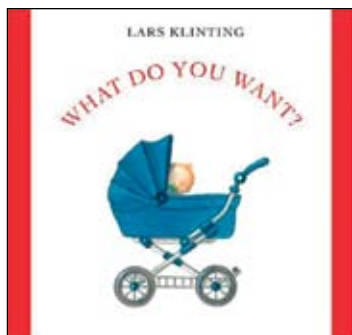
Museum Shapes, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Trashy Town, by Andrea Zimmerman and David Clemesha; illus. by Dan Yaccarino.

What Do Wheels Do All Day? by April Jones Prince; illus. by Giles Laroche.

Mathematics

By exploring ways to use rulers, measuring cups, abacuses, and other mathematical instruments, children learn more than just counting skills: they learn mathematical sequencing, patterns and organization, measurement, and spatial relations. The books listed below cover counting (*Let's Count*), size comparisons of small to big (*Big Red Barn*), and sets (*Five Creatures*).



What Do You Want?

Written and illustrated by Lars Klinting. Translated by Maria Lundin.

There are no numbers in this book, but the concept of pairing one item with its match fosters associative and sequencing skills, which are mathematical foundations. The “bird wants . . . its branch,” “the carriage wants . . . its baby,” “the little brother [with a bruise on his forehead] wants . . . his band-aid.” This book’s charm is in Klinting’s expressive illustrations and the anticipation children will feel as they turn the page to discover the match.

After reading this book to children, teachers can

- plan matching activities, which can be verbal or physical. Matches can be as concrete as finding related objects (such as a bowl and spoon) or as abstract as noting that a chicken and egg go together.
- have the children make matching cards by cutting out pictures from magazines of things that go together—a foot and a ball, for example. They can glue the pictures on index cards, to be laminated using clear adhesive paper. With the teacher’s help, the children can make up rules for playing a matching game.

More books about mathematics

Big Fat Hen, by Keith Baker.

Big Red Barn, by Margaret Wise Brown; illus. by Felicia Bond.

The Doorbell Rang, by Pat Hutchins.

Five Creatures, by Emily Jenkins; illus. by Tomek Bogacki.

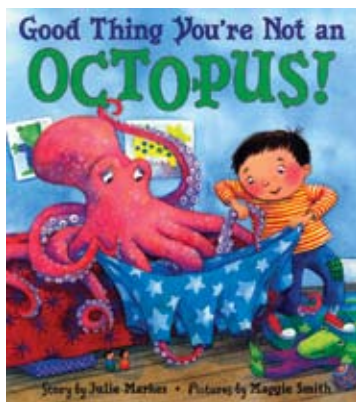
Let's Count, by Tana Hoban.

One Duck Stuck, by Phyllis Root; illus. by Jane Chapman.

One Grain of Rice: A Mathematical Folktale, by Demi.

Dramatic play

Using dramatic play to act out fantasies gives children a way to determine their needs and work out their fears. Children find security in acting out daily routines; activities, such as caring for babies (with a doll and bottle) or baking (with frying pan and cookbook), can also encourage social-emotional development and teamwork. In addition to acting out the familiar, children love to dramatize traditional tales—especially with costumes and props. Such tales deal with everyday emotional hurdles: bullying (*Anansi*), separation (*Goldilocks*), or fear of a powerful animal (*The Story of Little Babaji*). Through imaginative play, a child can experiment with being the boss, being nurturing, or being part of a team.



Good Thing You're Not an Octopus

Written by Julie Markes. Illustrated by Maggie Smith.

While routines are important to them, young children can sometimes be less than cooperative. This book is a humorous take on children's resistance to certain parts of their day. "You don't like to get dressed in the morning? It's a good thing you're not an octopus. If you were an octopus, you would have eight legs to put in your pants!" From the shark that has to brush 200 teeth to the bear whose nap lasts all winter, children will laugh at the fact that they don't have it so bad after all.

After reading this book to children, teachers can

- stock the dramatic play area with reading materials that go along with play themes (e.g., magazines for patients waiting for the doctor); dress-up clothes for boys and girls; blankets to cover sleepy babies; dishes, silverware, and pots and pans for cooking and eating favorite foods.
- make or purchase animal puppets that children can use to act out the routines in *Good Thing You're Not an Octopus*. Offer additional animal puppets that don't appear in the book to encourage children to make up new parts to the story.

More books about routines at home and school

Bee-bim Bop! by Linda Sue Park; illus. by Ho Baek Lee.

Bread Comes to Life, by George Levenson; illus. by Schmuell Thaler.

I Eat Fruit, by Hannah Tofts.

Miss Polly Has a Dolly, by Pamela Duncan Edwards; illus. by Elicia Castaldi.

Mother Mother I Feel Sick, by Remy Charlip.

Mother, Mother, I Want Another, by Maria Polushkin Robbins; illus. by Jon Goodell.

Pete's a Pizza, by William Steig.

Pretend Soup, by Mollie Katzen.

Traditional tales

Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock, by Eric A. Kimmel; illus. by Janet Stevens.

Goldilocks and the Three Bears, by Valeri Gorbachev.

Grandma Lena's Big Ol' Turnip, by Denia Lewis Hester; illus. by Jackie Urbanovic.

Stone Soup, by Marcia Brown.

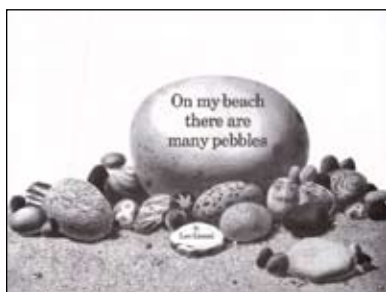
The Story of Little Babaji, by Helen Bannerman; illus. by Fred Marcellino.

The Three Billy Goats Gruff, by Paul Galdone.

The Three Little Pigs, by Paul Galdone.

Water play and sand play

Water and sand are two of the most enjoyable sensory materials in the natural world. They're soothing to the touch, simply fun to play with, and quite a challenge to control. Books can expand children's awareness of these materials. For example, let children browse through *It Looked Like Spilt Milk*, by Charles G. Shaw, as they begin to explore the properties of water and other liquids. Water and sand play is also a good vehicle for encouraging teamwork and investigations.



On My Beach There Are Many Pebbles

Written and illustrated by Leo Lionni.

Lionni's pencil dramatizes simple beach pebbles in this black-and-white classic. The book's subtle humor encourages readers to look for familiar objects in the stones they see at the beach. There are "fishpebbles" and "peoplepebbles." One pebble looks like a cello, and another looks like an owl giving a wink. Not only does this story fuel the imagination, but it is soothing as well. By paying such respect to the small stones lining the shore and inviting readers out onto his beach "to look for other pebbles," Lionni makes readers feel at home in the natural world.

After reading this book to children, teachers can

- take the children on a neighborhood walk to collect rocks and pebbles. Have the children wash, then dry, their collections, observing how the rocks and pebbles look when they are wet and when they are dry again. Ask children, "What do you see in this rock?" "Does it remind you of anything or anybody?"
- offer children a collection of rocks, pebbles, stones, gravel, shells, and other natural objects to examine. Children can arrange and sort these items by various characteristics: size (small to large), texture (smooth to rough), color (grey, brown, black, rust), and overall appearance (speckled, shiny, round, oval, square).

More books about sand and water

A Cool Drink of Water, by Barbara Kerley.

An Island Grows, by Lola M. Schaefer; illus. by Cathie Felstead.

It Looked Like Spilt Milk, by Charles G. Shaw.

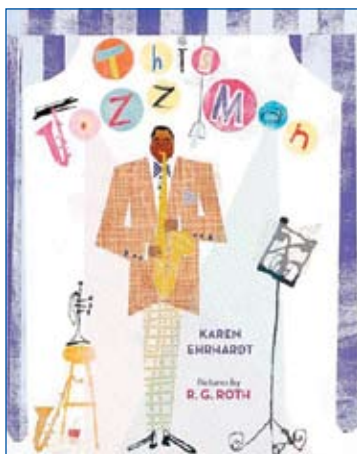
Mama, by Jeanette Winter.

Mrs. Wishy-Washy, by Joy Cowley.

Owen and Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship, by Isabella and Craig Hatkoff and Dr. Paula Kahumbu; photos by Peter Greste.

Music

The importance of music in children's lives is overwhelming: music triggers emotion, facilitates patterned language development, teaches rhythm, encourages movement and coordination, and is a healthy form of self-expression. The following books expand children's musical vocabulary by offering them a variety of sounds from different cultures.



This Jazz Man

Written by Karen Ehrhardt. Illustrated by R.G. Roth.

To the favorite tune of "This Old Man, He Played One," meet nine of the world's greatest jazz players. The book opens with Louis Armstrong and the following lyrics: "This jazz man, he plays one; He plays rhythm with his thumb; With a snap! snap! snazzy-snap! Give the man a hand; This jazz man scats with the band. Beee-diddly-doo-ah! Dooo-AAAAAH!" The illustrations, mixed media collage, and printmaking on watercolor paper make the book sing like the music itself. Ticket stubs and curtains on the opening pages and back cover increase the reader's anticipation of the entertainment inside. One of the very best books of its year, this is a sure hit for read-aloud time.

After reading this book to children, teachers can

- provide rhythm instruments children can use to make their own jazz music. Invite children to play their instruments while marching around the room or outdoors.
- play the music of Louis Armstrong and other jazz musicians. Ask children to listen closely to hear the sounds of different instruments.

More books about music

Most of the titles below are interactive books. Readers memorize the songs and then can "read" the book on their own.

De Colores, by Jose-Luis Orozco; illus. by Elisa Kleven.

Diez Deditos, by Jose-Luis Orozco; illus. by Elisa Kleven.

He's Got the Whole World in His Hands, illus. by Kadir Nelson.

Music Music for Everyone, by Vera B. Williams.

Over in the Meadow, by Olive A. Wadsworth; illus. by Anna Wojtech.

This Little Light of Mine, by E.B. Lewis.

We All Sing with the Same Voice, by J. Philip Miller and Sheppard M. Greene; illus. Paul Meisel.

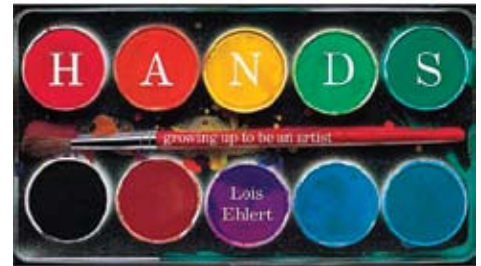
Art

Art making is an excellent tool for self-expression. Making visual art sharpens children's observation skills, improves their conceptual understanding of mixing colors and manipulating materials, enhances fine motor coordination, and gives them a sense of accomplishment. These books awaken the artist in each reader and validate the importance of being an artist both in professional (*Museum ABC*) and personal (*I Ain't Gonna Paint No More*) contexts.

Hands: Growing Up to Be an Artist

Written and illustrated by Lois Ehlert.

As a child, Lois Ehlert watched both her parents work with their hands, one as a carpenter and the other as a seamstress. Sometimes they worked independently, and sometimes they worked together. Ehlert writes that "creativity is in all of us; we just need time—and a place—to nurture it," and this book has the potential to nurture the creative spirit in every reader. The pages are saturated with color and often die-cut to fit the objects they portray. The father's paint-splattered work pants and the mother's lace, tools, knickknacks, paints and paintbrushes, and garden supplies are some of the images that will make children want to carve out their own spot at the table and lose themselves in their work.



After reading this book to children, teachers can

- introduce children to the work of different artists who have unique styles and use different materials in their creations. Inexpensive art posters are readily available from museum stores.
- organize a children's art show and invite families and community members to see the beautifully displayed results of children's explorations in different media—paint, torn paper, found items, crayons, markers, clay, fabric—to create drawings, collages, sculptures, and murals.

More books about art

The Dot, by Peter H. Reynolds.

I Ain't Gonna Paint No More! by Karen Beaumont; illus. by David Catrow.

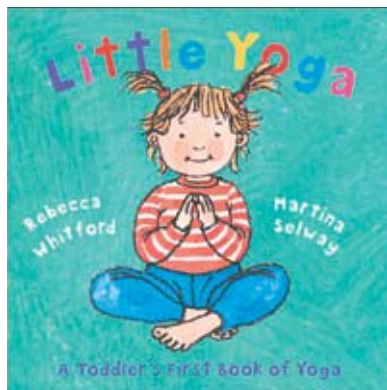
Museum ABC, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

To Be an Artist, by Maya Ajmera and John D. Ivanko.

Movement

It's time to get off the couch! In a country saddled with health concerns, including obesity, it's never too early to help children enjoy exercising their bodies. Imitating animals, the subject of many of the books below, is

a natural way to make movement fun and empowering and to give children greater body awareness. These are how-to books for the younger set.



Little Yoga: A Toddler's First Book of Yoga

Written by Rebecca Whitford. Illustrated by Martina Selway.

Don't expect to read this book straight through; the children in your classrooms will want to interrupt to try the poses on each page. This age-appropriate introduction to yoga, which steers clear of technicalities, teaches children to imitate familiar animals: "Yoga baby breathes like a lion—haaaaa" and "crouches like a frog." The yoga practice offered here is immediately appealing and accessible to young ones. A few pages of photographs and explanation at the back of the book complement the colorful illustrations throughout.

After reading this book to children, teachers can

- Invite a yoga instructor to visit the class to teach the children some simple poses.
- Plan other activities that invite children to move their bodies in different ways—jumping rope, dancing with hula hoops, and line dancing, for example.

More books about movement

From Head to Toe, by Eric Carle.

Get Up and Go, by Nancy Carlson.

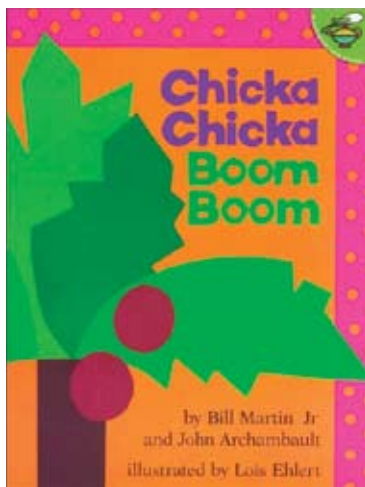
Move, by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page.

We're Going on a Bear Hunt, by Michael Rosen; illus. by Helen Oxenbury.

Writing

Writing is a powerful way to express oneself. By putting thoughts to paper, you can tell a story, write the U.S. president a letter, or request a book at the library. Learning to write begins well before children put full sentences to paper. It begins as children gain familiarity with the alphabet, learn about writing instruments—pencils, crayons, and computer keyboards—and recognize simple words in everyday places, such as STOP on the familiar red street sign. Environmental print, such as that featured in *City Signs*, offers contextual hints that make deciphering words even more fun. With the variety of wonderful books on the subject, early literacy learning should be anything but rote. Good alphabet books are visually stunning (*Alphabet Under Construction*) and can include a solid story line (*Max's ABC*).

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Chicka Chicka Boom Boom

Written by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault. Illustrated by Lois Ehlert.

This modern classic weaves together a compelling story and an alphabet lesson with rhyme and rhythm. In a dramatic chant-along about too many heavy letters following each other—in alphabetical order, of course—to the top of a wobbly coconut tree, the result is a big “Boom! Boom!” when the letters come crashing down. Children can’t get enough of the fun, and luckily, there are numerous ways to extend the book in the classroom.

In addition to creating your own alphabet activities, take a look at the paperback-and-CD set, which features Ray Charles vocals. The *Chicka Chicka ABC Magnet Book* is a hands-on variation; children will enjoy matching the magnetized letters to those printed on the pages of this shortened, stand-up version.

After reading this book to children, teachers can

- find ideas for using the book on page 21 in “Young Readers Respond: The Importance of Child Participation in Emerging Literacy,” by Claudia J. McVicker in the May 2007 issue of *Young Children*.
- lead children in a choral reading of *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. See the following Web link for a description of how to do this with three groups of children. www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson793/ChickaChicka123.pdf
- Make a *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* book bag for families to borrow so they can read with their children at home. Include a one-page handout to share ideas on how to involve children in the read-aloud experience.

More books about writing

Alphabet Under Construction, by Denise Fleming.

Bunny Cakes, by Rosemary Wells.

City Signs, by Zoran Milich.

Daddy Goes to Work, by Jabari Asim; illus. by Aaron Boyd.

dear juno, by Soyung Pak; illus. by Susan Kathleen Hartung.

Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School, by Mark Teague.

Max’s ABC, by Rosemary Wells.

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