



The TOTLETTER

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Bedtime Stories for Young Brains

Studies show that children's preschool vocabularies improve when parents read more!

A little more than a year ago, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement saying that all pediatric primary care should include literacy promotion, starting at birth.

That means pediatricians taking care of infants and toddlers should routinely be advising parents about how important it is to read to even very young children. The policy statement, includes a review of the extensive research on the links between growing up with books and reading aloud, and later language development and school success.

But while we know that reading to a young child is associated with good outcomes, there is only limited understanding of what the mechanism might be. Two new studies examine the unexpectedly complex interactions that happen when you put a small child on your lap and open a picture book.

The journal *Pediatrics* published a study that used functional magnetic resonance imaging to study brain activity in 3-to 5-year-old children as they listened to age-appropriate stories. The researchers found differences in brain activation according to how much the children had been read to at home.

Children whose parents reported more reading at home and more books in the home showed significantly greater activation of brain areas in a region of the left hemisphere called the parietal-temporal-occipital association cortex. This brain area is "a watershed region, all about multisensory integration, integrating sound and then visual stimulation," said the lead author, Dr. John S. Hutton, a clinical research fellow at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

This region of the brain is known to be very active when older children read to themselves, but Dr. Hutton notes that it also lights up when younger

children are hearing stories. What was especially novel was that children who were exposed to more books and home reading showed significantly more activity in the areas of the brain that process visual association, even though the child was in the scanner just listening to a story and could not see any pictures.

"When kids are hearing stories, they're imagining in their mind's eye when they hear the story," said Dr. Hutton. "For example, 'The frog jumped over the log.' I've seen a frog before, I've seen a log before, what does that look like?"

The different levels of brain activation, he said, suggest that children who have more practice in developing those visual images, as they look at picture books and listen to stories, may develop skills that will help them make images and stories out of words later on.

"It helps them understand what things look like, and may help them transition to books without pictures," he said. "It will help them later be better readers because they've developed that part of the brain that helps them see what is going on in the story."

Dr. Hutton speculated that the book may also be stimulating creativity in a way that cartoons and other screen-related entertainments may not.

"When we show them a video of a story, do we short circuit that process a little?" he asked. "Are we taking that job away from them? They're not having to imagine the story; it's just being fed to them."

We know that it is important that young children hear language, and that they need to hear it from people, not from screens. Unfortunately, there are serious disparities in how much language children hear — most famously demonstrated in a Kansas study

that found poor children heard millions fewer words by age 3.

But it turns out that reading to — and with — young children may amplify the language they hear more than just talking. In August, *Psychological Science* reported on researchers who studied the language content of picture books. They put together a selection from teacher recommendations, Amazon best sellers, and other books that parents are likely to be reading at bedtime.

In comparing the language in books to the language used by parents talking to their children, the researchers found that the picture books contained more “unique word types.”

“Books contain a more diverse set of words than child-directed speech,” said the lead author, Jessica Montag, an assistant research psychologist at the University of California, Riverside. “This would suggest that children who are being read to by caregivers are hearing vocabulary words that kids who are not being read to are probably not hearing.”

So reading picture books with young children may mean that they hear more words, while at the same time, their brains practice creating the images associated with those words — and with the more complex sentences and rhymes that make up even simple stories.

“I think that we’ve learned that early reading is more than just a nice thing to do with kids,” Dr. Hutton said. “It really does have a very important role to play in building brain networks that will serve children long-term as they transition from verbal to reading.”

And as every parent who has read a bedtime story knows, this is all happening in the context of face-time, of skin-to-skin contact, of the hard-to-quantify but essential mix of security and comfort and ritual. It’s what makes toddlers demand the same story over and over again, and it’s the reason parents tear up (especially those of us with adult children) when we occasionally happen across a long-ago bedtime book.

Source: newyorkstimes.com; by PERRI KLASS, M.D.; August 17, 2015



The Benefits of Children Doing Crafts!

Many people consider math, reading, and writing to be the most important things to teach your children. One thing that we can do with our children that is incredibly important is arts and crafts! Art paper and crayons may seem “boring” and “outdated” to a child who’s used to flashy video games and battery-operated toys. However, many experts urge parents to get their children to do at least one hour of arts and crafts a week. There’s more to arts and crafts than making cute pictures to hang on the refrigerator. Each time your child creates something, he actually sharpens important skills that he’ll be able to use for the rest of his life.

Here are some of the benefits of children doing arts and crafts:

- The most obvious benefit of doing arts and crafts is creativity. This is a useful skill in life, no matter what career children will end up pursuing
- Arts and crafts help develop the imagination. It teaches children that they don’t need toys to have fun and that their minds have no limits.
- Arts and crafts also help children learn how to make choices, as they will have to decide along the way what tools to use, how to decorate their crafts and how to use them once finished.
- Using scissors, crayons, paint brushes etc, helps to improve coordination and manual dexterity, by stretching and strengthening the muscles in the hand. (These are the same muscles children use for writing, and even sports).
- Arts and crafts help to create self expression. Children can learn to express their emotions and appreciate the importance of following their creative instincts. (Note: To encourage this, most crafts should be free and open-ended allowing children to create and express themselves freely.)
- Arts and crafts help to build confidence. “I made something special and unique.” And if the children struggle a bit with the scissors, or make a mess with the paint, arts and crafts intrinsically honours the process—especially if they get positive feedback about their masterpieces! Children learn that they can trust themselves, so they won’t be afraid to try new

things or be frustrated if they don't succeed right away.

- It's a great way to recycle old items and turn them into art. You can teach "eco-awareness" early by finding creative uses for old shoeboxes, egg cartons, toilet paper rolls, plastic bottles, etc.
- If the craft is complex, children will need to follow a series of steps, which requires them to memorize the process and concentrate on following it through. Some crafts require delicate work and may need more than one try before kids get it right. This is a good way for kids to learn patience and to understand that sometimes it takes work to achieve a positive final result.

Taken in part from '8 Life Skills That Kids Get From Doing Crafts', by Kim Y09 & 'What are the Benefits of Arts & Crafts for Children', by www.livestrong.com



Fun with Dancing

Children LOVE to dance. Dancing can be so much fun when children are allowed to move in any way they want. Using various accessories when free-dancing will enhance the experience.



Here are some ideas of what you can use:

- Sheer Scarves - one per child
- Balloons (require close supervision)
- Jingle Bells - sewn on an elastic band to fit to ea. child's wrist or ankle
- Pom-Pom's
- Flashlights - covered with coloured cellophane

Musical Games:

- **Freeze Dance:** Put on some music and have the children dance around the room. When the music stops, everyone falls down or has to freeze in whatever position they were in. When the music begins again, everyone gets up and dances some more.

- **Let's Pretend:** Give the children a series of instructions such as "Let's pretend to move like the wind." "Can you pretend to float like snowflakes?"
- **Musical Hugs:** Turn on some lively music and have the children dance around the room. When the music stops the children have to find a partner to hug. Often 2, 3, or more children hug each other. The dancing starts again when the music starts
- **Musical Art:** Cover a table with paper. Play any type of music. While playing the music have the children walk around the table with a marker or a crayon in hand, making movements on the paper to the beat of the music. Vary types of music, or play a stop and go "freeze" game. Ask children to draw what the music sounds like!
- **Musical Movements:** Use a bell and a set of rhythm sticks or wooden spoons for a fun movement activity on a rainy/snowy day! "Click" a slow beat on the sticks. Call this "walking music". Then "click" out a faster beat with the sticks. Call this "jogging music". Now, ask the children to listen to the sticks' rhythm. When they hear the "walking music", they should walk around the room. When they hear the "jogging music", jog. Now ring the bell. This means "stop and drop". Have fun with the slow and fast beats of the sticks ("walking music" and "jogging music") and ring the bell. This is a great physical and auditory workout!

Craft Ideas

Gluing Macaroni

Materials:

Construction paper, glue, various shapes of macaroni, tempera paint (optional), popsicle sticks (optional).

1. Give each child a piece of construction paper to glue the macaroni onto or cut the paper into a shape like a flower, apple, or snowman, etc.
2. Have the children cover their paper/shape with glue. The popsicle sticks can be used to spread the glue with.
3. When the glue is dry, let them paint the macaroni. (optional)



Snow Ball Painting

Materials:

Dry tempera (washable) paint, paper, mittens for each child, snowballs and shallow dish(es)

1. Make or have the children make one snowball for each child
2. Pour the tempera into a dish, one dish for each colour
3. Have the children put mittens on
4. Give each child a snowball and a piece of paper, have them dip the snowballs into the paint and then rub the snowballs onto the paper.

Heart Designs

Materials:

Various colours of construction paper or pre-cut hearts (for younger children) of different colours and sizes, scissors and glue

1. If the children are able to use scissors, have them cut out some heart shapes themselves.
2. For the younger children give them the pre-cut heart shapes.
3. The children can glue the heart shapes onto the construction paper to form a design.



Make Your Own Egg Carton Men

Materials:

Paper egg cartons, markers, glue, and other optional items such as: pipe cleaners, glitter, feathers, popsicle sticks etc.

1. Give the children a section of the egg carton along with some glue, and items to decorate and create their own men with.
2. Use the pipe cleaners to make the arms and legs.
3. Fasten the man to a popsicle stick (optional).



Streamer Baton

Materials:

Paper towel tube, paper streamers or ribbon, tape

1. Cut the paper streamers or ribbon into long strips.
2. Tape the stripes onto each end of the paper towel tube to make a colourful baton - perfect for dancing!



Activities and Games:

Snow Hurdles

Make various sizes of snowballs & snow 'boulders', using them to build a course of hurdles for the children to jump over, jump onto or to run around.

For our Feathered Friends

String cranberries, popcorn, and cereal onto a fishing line to make a garland. String the garland along a tree or a fence to attract and feed the birds.

Build a Snow Castle

Use sand shovels, buckets and sand molds to build snow castles.

Snowy Golf

Make a golf course by packing down a section of snow every few feet. Bury tin cans halfway down in the snow to create holes, and mark them with mini flagsticks.

Pin the Nose on the Snowman

Build a snowman with the children. Blindfold each child and let him try to get the carrot nose in place on the snowman's face.

Valentines Heart Hunt

Cut out of red, white, blue, yellow and green paper hearts of all shapes and sizes, then cut each heart into four pieces and scatter the pieces all over the room/house, hiding them on the floor, chairs, tables, behind couches etc. Have the children find all the pieces of the hearts and try to put the hearts back together again.



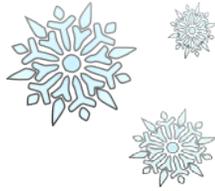
Songs and Fingerplays

Snowflakes in my Hair

Sung to: 'On the Good Ship Lollipop'

There are snowflakes in my hair,
There are snowflakes everywhere.
So sing with me
'bout the snowflakes th-at we can see.

*Additional verses: "There is sunshine; There are raindrops..."



The Winter Pokey

Sung to: "The Hokey-Pokey"

You put your right mitten in,
You take your right mitten out.
You put your right mitten in,
And you shake it all about.
You do the winter pokey, [shiver]
And you turn yourself around.
That's what it's all about!



You put your left mitten in....
You put your right boot....
You put your left boot....
You put your long scarf in....
You put your warm cap in....
You put your snowsuit in....

Oh, Here we are Together

Sung to: "Did You Ever See a Lassie?"

Oh, here we are together, together, together,
Oh, here we are together, how happy are we. There's
(child's name) and (child's name) and (child's name)... Oh, here we
are together, so happy are we.

I Wiggle

I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my figures,
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my toes,
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my shoulders,
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my nose.
No more wiggles are left in me,
So I will be as still as can be.



Tasty Treats

Banana Dogs

1 banana
1 whole wheat hot dog bun
peanut butter
Optional: Jam, sunflower seeds



Simply spread a whole wheat hot dog bun with peanut butter, sprinkle with sunflower seeds, and top with a whole, peeled banana and a squiggle of jam. Add a side of milk to round out the meal.

Alternatively: You could use a tortilla instead of a bun to make a banana burrito!

Carrot Ginger Dip

This wholesome dip can be served with raw vegetables or as a spread on toast, crackers or bagels.

Medium carrot, sliced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch pc. of ginger, sliced
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon curry powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plain yogurt (for added nutritional value, use Greek yogurt - which is a great source of protein!)
2 tablespoons olive oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vinegar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon honey or sugar
Salt to taste

Steam carrots and ginger until tender. Blend them with remaining ingredients in food processor until smooth.

Make your Own Nut Free Trail Mix

Mix together things like:

Raisins
Sunflower seeds
Soy beans
Pumpkins seeds
Dried cranberries, blueberries
Dried apples, apricots (chopped)
Cheerios
Etc...

Funky Fruit Snack

Choose any kind of fruit as long as they are all close in size. Options: Pears, apples, oranges etc.

Slice the pieces of fruit and alternately stack the pieces as shown in the picture.

