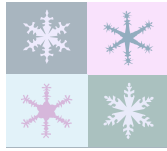


Read to Me

A newsletter for families and others who care about the future of young people.

Volume 1, Issue 1

Winter 2006-07



Over 20,000 Children's Books Sent Out This Past Year

Special Points of Interest in this newsletter:

- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library reaches over 2000 local children
- Born Learning web page information
- Children's play encourages literacy
- Handling books increases coordination skills

United Way of Southwest Minnesota began local sponsorship of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Program in August 2005. Since then over 20,000 wonderful children's books have been mailed to the homes of enrolled children.

To enroll in Imagination Library, a child must be between the ages of birth to five years old. The child needs to live within our service area (defined by the area served by the following school districts: Balaton, Canby, Lake Benton, Lakeview, Lincoln HI, Lynd, Marshall, Milroy, Minneota, Murray County Central, Russell-Tyler-Ruthton, Tracy, Walnut Grove/Westbrook, Yellow Medicine East. Private or charter schools are included.)

The books are free to families. The only 'catch' is that the parents need to take time to read it out loud to their child. It sounds almost too simple to be true, but by reading regularly with your children during their preschool years, you are giving them the biggest boost toward a successful education that they will ever get.

Imagination Library costs United Way of Southwest Minnesota \$27 per enrolled child, per year. This is the actual costs of the 12 books plus bulk library rate. This is paid locally through contributors to the annual United Way campaign and by other special underwriters like several area Rotary Clubs, the Marshall Crime Prevention Fund and other service clubs.

Contributors and underwriters of the program are always welcome and that support is greatly appreciated at any time. Contributions can be sent to United Way of Southwest MN, P.O. Box 41, Marshall, MN 56258.



Please keep your address current with United Way of Southwest Minnesota.

Imagination Library books are mailed out at bulk library rates and **can not be forwarded** by the post office. Call us (507-929-2273) or email us (unitedway@unitedwayswmn.org) right away if your address changes. Even though our office changes the data base immediately upon notification, it takes 6-8 weeks for address changes to go into effect at the publisher.

Help Shape Your Child's World

Everyday life is a learning experience for children. Born Learning is a public engagement campaign that helps parents, grandparents and caregivers turn everyday moments into fun learning opportunities. More information and resources are available at www.bornlearning.org.

Sign up for a free monthly electronic newsletter '*bits of understanding*' on this web site. Each issue features a topic of interest to caregivers. (Note: Your email address will not be shared and no additional email can be attributed to a subscription to this newsletter.)



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Opinion vs. research

Child development research shows that play is important to all aspects of a child's development, including the development of language and literacy. However, many adults do not recognize just how important it is.



In a recent survey about the importance of play in children's development, 80% of parents of children birth to six felt play was important to the development of language skills.



Of all future parents, grandparents and non-parents surveyed, only 70% thought play was important to the development of literacy.



Of parents of children ages zero to six whose income was under \$30K, 70% thought it important, while 81% of parents with incomes over \$50K recognized the value of play in contributing to a child's literacy.



Early vocabulary is the biggest determinant of later literacy.

Sources: Civitas, Zero to Three, BRIO



The beginnings of literacy appear in activities such as conversations about the words on street signs or labels on favorite foods.

How does my child develop literacy through play?

It is through play that your child discovers language and learns to communicate through reading and writing. **When your child sings a song, looks at pictures in a book or turns the pages in a book, she is both playing and taking important steps to literacy.** Reading, writing, talking and listening can all be encouraged through play.

Reading
enhances
pretend
play....

Young children who are read to often introduce reading into their fantasy play. They may pretend to read books to dolls or stuffed animals, or they may incorporate written materials into their play. **Playing with story ideas can begin very early.** A two-and-a-half-year-old may act out a scene from a book or repeat a sentence.

...so
does
writing.

From age three, children often imitate writing in their pretend play: police officers write traffic tickets, waitresses write orders. When children bring writing into their play it indicates that they recognize writing as an activity worth imitating and that **they are seeking ways to make it serve their own purposes.**

ACTION ITEMS

READING

1

Babies: Books are great first toys for babies. Begin with books that:

- Can be propped up for a baby to look at
- Have pictures in bright contrasting colors
- Are made of cardboard or cloth to withstand a little chewing and make page turning easier

Toddlers and pre-schoolers: Toddlers are just able to sit and listen to a complete story. Try books that:

- Have repetitious text about familiar objects
- Involve activities such as counting, identifying colors, objects or letters
- Are about subjects that interest the child
- Deal with topics that relate to the child's life, such as toilet training or new siblings
- Are interactive, such as having lifting flaps

2

WRITING

Babies: Even a baby can prepare for writing. Let her:

- Hold a rattle to develop grasping skills
- Play with magnetic letters

Toddlers and pre-schoolers: to get her interested:

- Give her safe writing props to incorporate into her play, like crayons, blank paper, newspaper and construction paper, thick sticks of chalk and thick magic markers
- Promote the development of her fine motor skills by letting her cut paper or trace letters
- Allow her to draw freely and creatively

Avenues for enhancing literacy



How can play help my child develop literacy from the beginning?

Literacy begins with play!

It starts long before your child goes to school and masters the technical skills involved in reading and writing.

Symbols used in play are bridges to literacy.

Through playful activities, such as pretend play, drawing, hearing a story and talking about its plot and characters, your child first experiments with language. **He learns what reading and writing are, and what he can do with them.** He also acquires attitudes about literacy.

Through gestures or marks on paper, your child uses symbols to create and communicate meaning. Whether in pretend play or other activities like drawing, symbols allow her to leave her immediate environment and explore imaginary works.

Play is a safe environment for your child to explore literacy. Because **play allows him to feel and act as if he is in control of his activity**, he can play with books and paper and pretend that he can actually read books or write stories. Therefore, through play, your child can feel like a reader or a writer before he knows how to read and write. **Such feelings can instill confidence**, create positive expectations about learning to read and write, and motivate a child to learn.

When first experimenting with words and letters, your child may use them in the same way as symbols. Eventually she will make the connection between these play experiences and the activities of reading and writing.

Children play by pretending to read to themselves.

Give-and-take conversation and storytelling help develop literacy skills. When your child begins to learn the art of conversation and storytelling, **encourage him by asking questions, sharing stories and creating plots and characters together.**

How does Play Encourage Literacy?

For your child, every word he hears and repeats, every storybook, song and nursery rhyme become the building blocks of literacy.

When he draws, pretends to read or write or invents stories, play allows your child to build his literacy skills by experimenting with pictures and symbols he has seen.

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TALKING

3

Babies:

- Talk and read with him at every opportunity
- Sing nursery rhymes and read books that play with word sounds

Toddlers and pre-schoolers:

- Whether at the grocery store, the park or the zoo, point out objects, signs and people
- Engage him in conversation and ask a lot of questions
- Play with words by making up funny names for people and objects. Making nonsense out of language helps children appreciate the rhythm and musicality of language
- Play rhyming games with words

LISTENING

4

Activities you can try with your child:

- A narrated version of hide-and-seek. When the child hides, the caregiver “thinks aloud” about where she could be. “Where is Laura?” a parent might say. “Maybe she’s in the refrigerator—did I put her next to the milk?” Such silly discussion within earshot of the hiding child will encourage her to listen as she waits to be found.
- Singing songs. Children love to listen to songs. Try adding new words to her favorite songs to pique her interest.

An excerpt from the book *Understanding Children*, by Richard Saul Wurman and Civitas, © 2002.



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This is a special newsletter for families who are enrolled in Imagination Library.



IMPORTANCE OF CROSSING THE MIDLINE



Handling Books Increases Coordination Skills

Books are an important part of life. Looking at or reading a book enables children to explore their world on their own and opens the world of learning to them. For the young child, opening books is a first step to learning the joy of reading. Opening a book and manipulating the pages also requires manual dexterity. Visual skills are also practiced as pictures are pointed out to them and as

they scan the book with their eyes from left to right. Learning the left to right movement is an introduction to writing as well as reading and it requires a child to cross the body midline. **Crossing the body midline is related to coordinated use of both sides of the body and it can be practiced when turning the pages of the book.** When the child reaches from one side of the book to the other side of the book,

coordination of both sides of the body occurs. By practicing this left to right coordination, the child is preparing for the left to right movements that are necessary when learning the skills of writing and reading.

*Nancy Dunlop,
Occupational Therapist
Montevideo Area Special
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United Way of Southwest Minnesota is an independent, local organization working to create lasting changes in people's lives and the communities in Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Yellow Medicine and western Redwood Counties of Minnesota.

Learn more about United Way of Southwest Minnesota at www.unitedwayswmn.org