



Playful communication:  
Supporting language with story, poetry,  
rhyme and song

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## Overview

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- **Why?**

Research confirms why language and communication skills are essential.

- **How?**

A brief explanation of the way playful communication contributes to the development language skills and dispositions of our youngest children.

- **What?**

What are some practical strategies to help young children achieve enduring literacy success?

Why is speech, language and communication SO important?



## What does the research tell us? (1)

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1. Through language children communicate with and understand others and their world. It helps them to establish their identity and to take control of their lives.
2. Speech, language and communication skills are the building blocks for learning – it's the most common medium used for teaching and learning in schools.
3. Language development in the first three years lays the foundation for future school success.

The quality of interactions makes a difference! There's a window of opportunity for building literacy skills in the years before school.



## What does the research tell us? (2)

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1. A language-rich environment at home and in early childhood settings is a major determinant in positive outcomes.
2. Adults are the key source of new vocabulary and language skills. The quality and quantity of words children hear is crucial – acquisition of language is closely associated with parents' and caregivers' speech.
3. Children who experience limited interactions are particularly at risk of language deficits.
4. A vocabulary gap appears around the first year of life and continues to widen with time.

How? Through playful communication children learn how language goes.

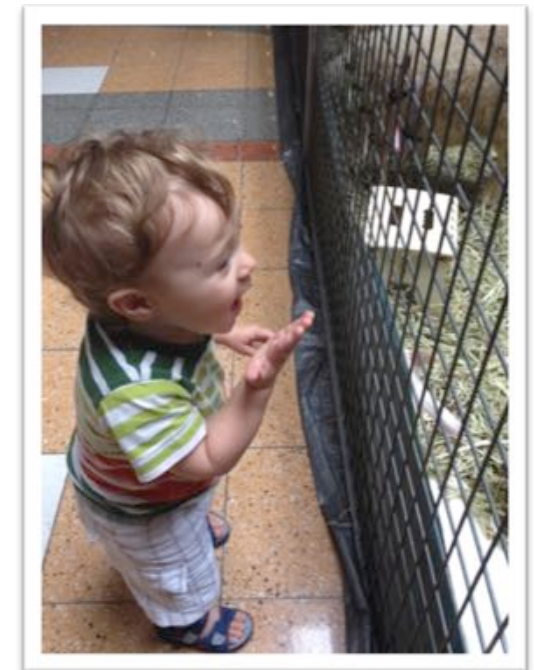
Sharing books, nursery rhymes, poetry and songs strengthen children's oral and written language abilities and offer endless opportunities to enjoy and explore language. You can:

- provide models of language for children to imitate as they get older.
- enhance listening skills and oral comprehension.
- expand vocabulary – expose children to new words as well as literary language they may not hear in everyday talk.
- provide opportunities to develop clear articulation, phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge.
- help develop ability to memorise, sequence, move to and feel patterns.
- enrich the imaginative landscape.



# How? Positive dispositions for learning develop early!

- Through playful communication children are involved and completely absorbed – “like a fish in water” (Laevers, 2005).
- Children pick up implicit messages about what adults value – developing a love of *all* kinds of books and reading is critical!
- In an atmosphere that’s inviting, it’s okay to “have a go” – this promotes confidence.
- Curiosity, wonder and interest in exploring new worlds, along with a desire to seek more information, are all essential dispositions for success.



## How – What's your role?

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Watch, listen to, and interact with children and their families to find out children's unique capacities and interests and use this to:

- build on their home language and prior experiences;
- provide challenges carefully tuned to current level of understanding and performance.

Take an active role – learning is mediated by responsive adults using variety of strategies, materials and teaching approaches. Children acquire or learn a mental process by sharing or using it when they interact with others (rather than through independent engagement and the provision of self-corrective materials).

## How? Some general strategies:

- **Wait and listen** (allow children time to initiate and/or respond to questions) when interacting round books.
- **Respect interactional styles** (e.g. attitudes towards direct questioning, eye contact varies across cultures).
- **Recast** – *“It up there.” “Yes, the koala’s up high in the tree.”*
- **Expand** – repeat child’s words and add another idea – *“Yes, I think it’s looking for leaves to nibble.”*
- **Extend** – provide information related to the topic and introduce new words/knowledge.
- **Use a variety of questions** that invite speculation and reflection – as language matures, limit questions that require single word responses.
- **Model** – display a desirable way of behaving, e.g. listening respectfully.
- **Encourage and give specific feedback.**
- **Scan** – encourage uninvolved/socially isolated children to participate, ensure no one child always dominates interactions.



# How? Turn book reading into a conversation

Read **with** children, rather than **to** them – it's the **talk around the book** that makes the difference

- Pay attention to what interests them
- Pause to ask questions, explain or make comments
- Avoid too many yes/no questions
- Ask open-ended questions that encourage thinking and offering opinions
- Repetition isn't boring! Children will have more to say as they become familiar with the book
- It also helps them learn the structure of narratives (Stories share a common framework with characters, settings, problems, actions and resolutions)

# How? Hearing, understanding and using new words

## Show:

- pointing to illustrations, using expression, or demonstrating actions (e.g. moving “*gracefully*”, or being “*clumsy*”) are all ways of **showing** word meaning



## Tell:

- Explain unusual phrases and define new words that children may not have heard – e.g. “*peculiar*” – *that means strange or odd.*

## Relate:

- Make text-to-life connections – *Can you remember a time when you were embarrassed?*
- Use words to express relations and categories: *A mango is a kind of **fruit**. So are apples, What else is a **fruit**?*



Engaging in conversations before, during and after reading fosters oral language – pictures can encourage talk about stories

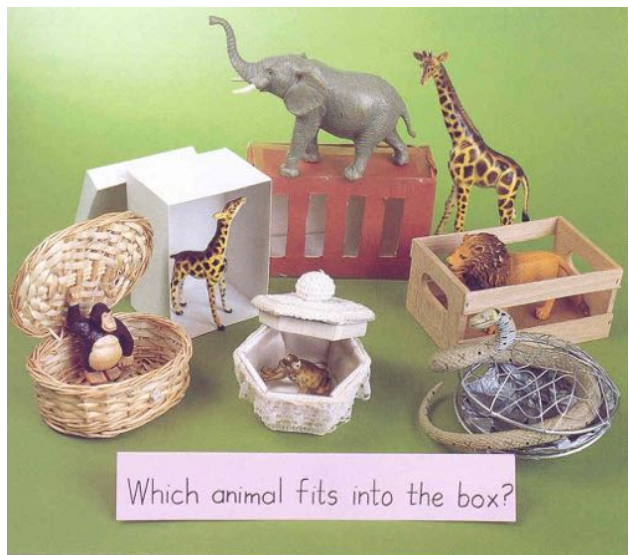


- Who might the building materials belong to?
- Why did they need them?
- Tell me about your house (flat/where you live).

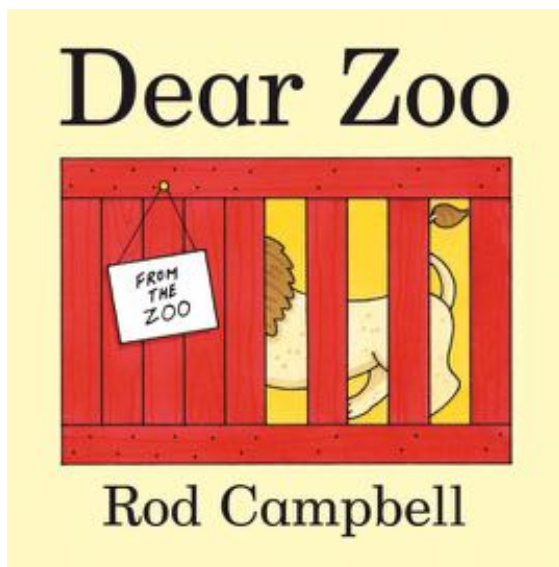


What questions could you ask with these pictures?





Displays and props invite conversations, investigations, story retelling and recreating experiences



## Make your own books:

Innovate on familiar stories, rhymes and songs

Walking through the garden, down to the tree

I see something moving

What can it be?

(give a clue to help children predict, before turning the page)

I see a **snail**, looking at me!



Walking through the garden, down to the tree

I can hear something moving

What can it be?

I see a dog looking at me!



Wading in the water, in the calm blue sea .....

# REBUS RHYMES – ENCOURAGE “HAVING A GO” AT READING

“What did you do?” said the



“I sat on a hog,” answered the



“Is he dead?” asked the



“That’s not funny!” said the



“Is that a



”?” asked the



“No it’s not,” replied the



“What is it then?” asked the



The Enchanted Learning website has a range of rebus rhymes

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/rhymes/abc/b.shtml>

(Machado, 2010, p. 364.)

# Rhymes, poems and songs are powerful carriers of rhythm

Children learn more easily and retain information longer when rhyme, rhythm and music are used.

As they hear and say/sing rhymes, it's impossible to avoid feeling the beat and rhythmic patterns. In addition, speech is developed as mouth and tongue muscles are exercised.

Encourage children to respond to the beat in an appropriate way – e.g. rock gently *to See-Saw Margery Daw*; how will we move *to The grand old duke of York*?

Explore dynamics – singing or saying rhymes softly, loudly, crescendo ... encourage children to experiment with their voices.

When rhymes and songs are used together with movement (e.g. in finger-plays), the extra sensory input for the brain enhances learning.

# Tuning in to sounds – Phonological awareness

Listening to sounds of speech prepares them for reading and writing – becoming aware that spoken language can be divided into smaller and smaller parts is a gradual process beginning in preschool.

There are different levels of difficulty in developing sensitivity to sound – moving from an awareness of:

- words (breaking down the continuous flow of sound in oral language);
- clapping beats of a word - syllables
- distinguishing words that rhyme (end with the same sound pattern)
- making up new rhyming words
- alliteration (identifying words that start with the same sound)

to the complex task of manipulating individual sounds in words (phonemic awareness).

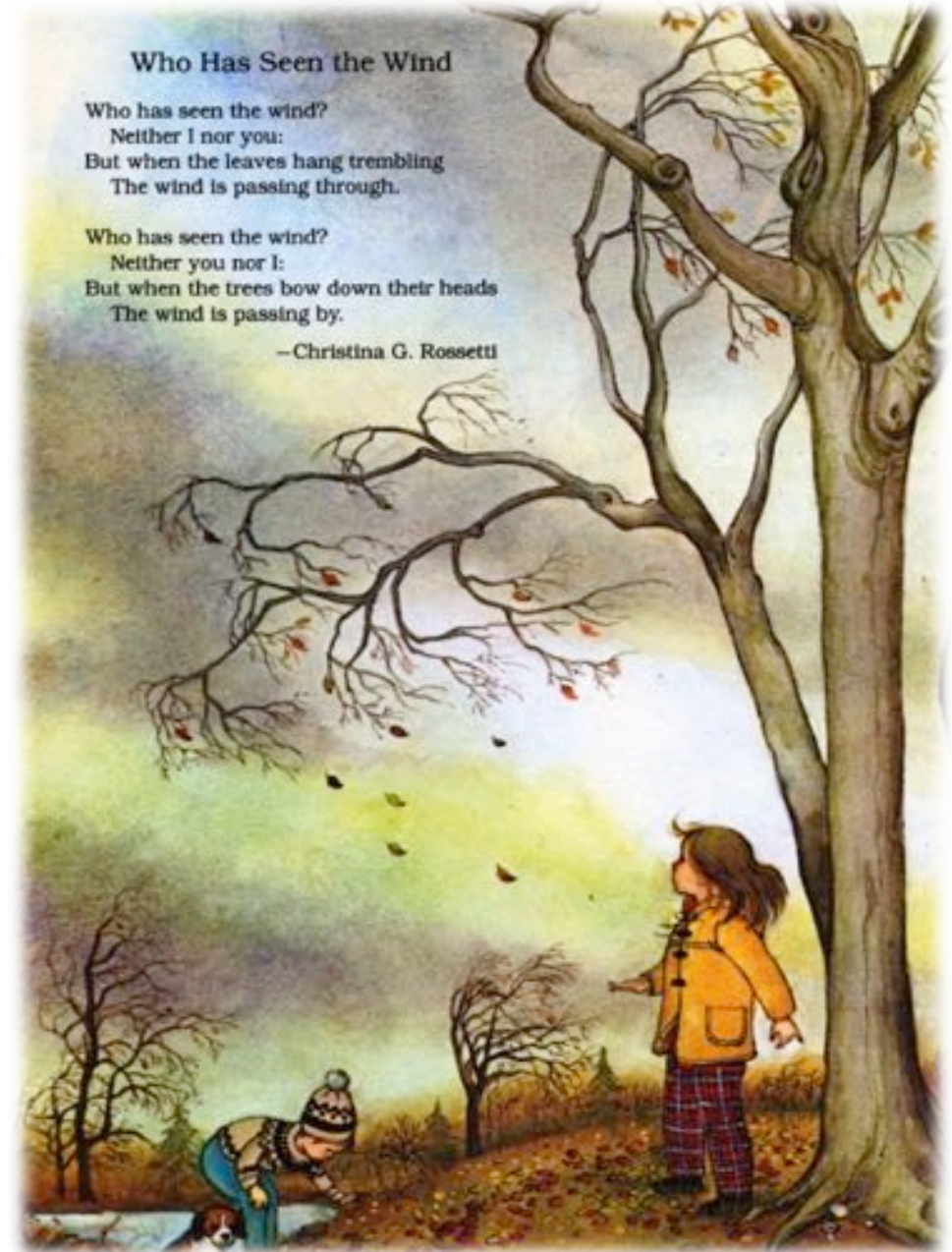


# Using poetry across the day

As well as incorporating rhymes and poems as part of group language sessions, they can be an integral part of daily routines –introduced incidentally as events occur, e.g. *Who has seen the wind* – as they go outside on a windy day.

Or when children have noticed the wind outside, you might use this poem and invite them to move like the wind, using their arms and legs, their hands and feet, or whole body to express their ideas about the wind and how it moves.

Talk about how the wind makes them feel.



## Who Has Seen the Wind

Who has seen the wind?  
Neither I nor you:  
But when the leaves hang trembling  
The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?  
Neither you nor I:  
But when the trees bow down their heads  
The wind is passing by.

—Christina G. Rossetti

Poetry for can make for smooth transitions – *Hopping song* or settling –  
*Jelly belly shakes*.

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**Hopping song**

Hop, hop, hop.  
Don't stop! Don't stop!  
Hop on your left leg,  
Hop on your right,  
Hop all day, hop all night,  
Hop, Hop, Hop.  
Then stop, And drop!

Rosemary Milne

**Jelly belly shakes**

Can you make your belly  
wobble like a jelly?  
Ready, steady, here we go,  
to and fro;  
Wibble, wobble, wibble, wobble,  
Shake!, Shake! Shake!

Rosemary Milne

# It helps feel the beat – try a round with older children (and talk about words and expand vocabulary)

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Stomp, chomp, big roars!

This is the way we stomp our feet,

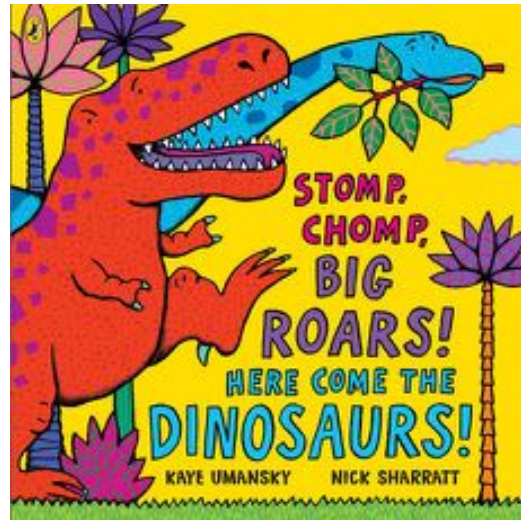
Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

This is the way we like to eat,

Chomp! Chomp! Chomp!

Stomp! Chomp! Big roars!

Here come the dinosaurs!



Sometimes we **eat** our food; sometimes we **chomp**!

Can you think of other words for **eat**?

Show me how you'd **stomp**.

I wonder what other kinds of animals roar?

There are lots of ways to use props:

e.g. If your dinosaur could talk, what would he say?

## Animal Voices

Can you .....

**PURR** like a cat in the sun?

**SQUEAK** like a mouse on the run?

**GRUNT** like a pig in a sty?

**TWEET** like a bird in the sky?

**BAA** like a sheep in a pen?

**CLUCK** like an egg-laying hen?

**BUZZ** like a bumbly bee?

**CAW** like a crow in a tree?

**CHOMP** like a horse with a carrot?

**SHRIEK** like a red and green parrot?

Julia Donaldson & Nick Sharratt

## Poetry can encourage active listening



- ▶ Listen – tell me the name of an animal you heard?
- ▶ Where does the poet tell us the crow is?

Alphabet knowledge is learned in a meaningful context  
(try making your own alphabet book with favourite poems)



**P p** (children delight in silly rhymes)

Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you  
been?

Under the waves in a submarine,

Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you see?

A wobbly jellyfish goggling at me.

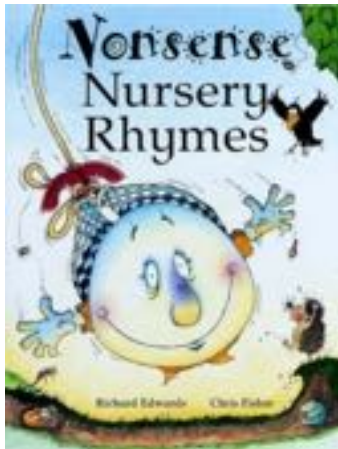
### **The Lost Cat**

We can't find the cat,  
We don't know where she's at.

Oh, where did she go?

Does anyone know?

Let's ask this walking hat. Shel Silverstein



Talk explicitly about letters and sounds

*Listen when I say "cat"*

*What's the first sound you hear?*

*Can you think of some other words that start with the /c/ sound?*

For those who are developing familiarity with letter names, you can ask:

*What letter will I write?*

So ...books, poems, rhymes, and songs– any time any where!

The more stories, poems, rhymes and songs children know – the more ideas they have to think about.

- They learn different ways of saying things and new ways of looking at things.
- They learn how words can paint pictures and create vivid mental images.

### ***Cat Kisses***

Sandpaper kisses on a cheek or a chin –  
that is the way for a day to begin!

Sandpaper kisses – a cuddle, a purr.  
I have an alarm clock that's covered with fur.

Bobbi Katz

## Some useful references

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