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Passionate About Picture Books

by Carolyn Hart

Have you ever stopped to consider how many books you are likely to read aloud to your children? If you begin reading two picture books each day when your child is six months old and continue until he is six years old, you will read more than 4,000 stories. Add a third book each day or a second, third or fourth child and you could easily be into the tens of thousands of picture books! And, once you and your child have had your fill of picture books, hopefully you will delve into loads chapter books and read those aloud, too.

Reading books aloud to preschoolers is not only hugely important to their development; it can present quite a challenge to parents. We are bound to read some books over and over (and over!) again because kids will insist on hearing the stories they love. The rest of the time, we should do our best to find books that are *worth reading*; the sort that will help our children become great readers and booklovers.

When visiting the library or a bookstore, we should try to choose books that will help a young child prepare for formal reading instruction:

- Alphabet books will help children learn about letter shapes and sounds. Many also introduce interesting facts and words.
- Rhyming books are also important to a young child because they help in the discovery that words are made up of sounds. This is a key concept in learning to read and should be emphasized.
- A child's vocabulary often grows as a result of the books she hears. In print we frequently encounter very different words than we hear in everyday conversation. After all, where else will you hear, "Once upon a time...?"
- Still other books enable a child to safely explore unfamiliar places and situations. This is very valuable to a child who is about to encounter something new (a trip to the dentist, going camping, starting school or visiting a farm).

Finally, keep in mind that reading books to children also improves their listening skills (although not necessarily when it is time to clean up or head off to bed!)

In a world that is jam-packed with "To Dos," reading aloud to preschoolers is a "Must Do." Please, please don't miss the opportunity to curl up with a couple of great picture books every single day. Your child and your child's teachers will thank you.

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