

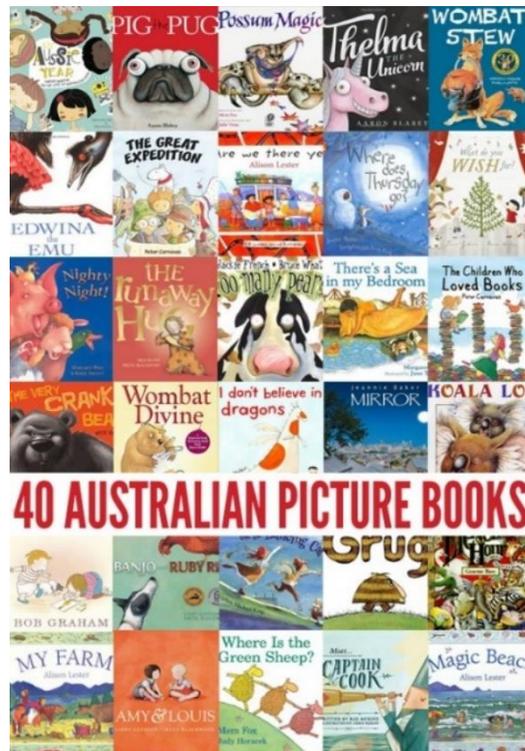
Book Week 2021

Celebrating Australian Authors and Illustrators

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Why reading is important for babies and young children

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/> Australian Parenting Website

Sharing stories, talking and singing every day **helps your child's development in many ways**. You can start reading aloud to your baby as early as you like – the earlier the better. Your baby will love being held in your arms, listening to your voice, hearing rhyme and rhythm, and looking at pictures

Reading and sharing stories can:

- help your child get to know sounds, words and language, and develop early literacy skills
- learn to value books and stories
- spark your child's imagination and stimulate curiosity
- help develop your child's brain, ability to focus, concentration, social skills and communication skills
- help your child learn the difference between 'real' and 'make-believe'
- help your child understand new or frightening events, and the strong emotions that come with them
- help your child learn about the world, their own culture and other cultures.

Sharing stories with your child doesn't mean you have to read from the book.

Just by **looking at books with your child and talking about them**, you can be a great storyteller and a good model for using language and books. Your child will learn by watching you hold a book the right way and seeing how you move through the book by gently turning the pages.

Reading stories with children has benefits for grown-ups too. The special time you spend reading together **promotes bonding** and helps to build your relationship with your child.

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Storytelling and songs

Reading isn't the only way to help with your child's language and literacy development.

Telling stories, singing songs and saying rhymes together are also great activities for early literacy skills – and your child will probably have a lot of fun at the same time. Sometimes your child might enjoy these activities more than reading.

You and your child might like to make up your own stories or share family stories. Your child will learn words and develop language skills from the songs, stories and conversations you share together.

Reading to your child in other languages

You can read, sing and tell stories with your child in **whatever language you feel most comfortable speaking**.

Using a language you're comfortable with helps you to communicate more easily. It also helps to make reading, singing and storytelling more fun for you and your child. Your child will still learn that words are made up of different letters, syllables and sounds, and that words usually link to the pictures on the page.

Don't worry if English isn't your child's first language. [Being bilingual](#) actually helps your child learn English when they start playgroup, kindergarten or school.

Dual-language books are a great resource, and many children's books are published in two languages. If you speak a language other than English at home, reading dual-language books with your child might also help you become more familiar with English.

Another option is to read a book aloud in English or listen to an audio book in English and then talk about the story with your child in whatever language feels most comfortable.

If you like, you can talk about the pictures in the book instead of reading the words. Could you and your child make up a story together? Do what you can and as much as you're comfortable with.

When to read, sing and tell stories with your child

Bedtime, bath time, potty time, on the train, on the bus, in the car, in the park, in the pram, in the cot, when you're in the GP's waiting room ... any time is a good time for a story! **You can make books part of your daily routine** – take them with you to share and enjoy everywhere.

Knowing when to stop can be just as important as finding the time to share a story in the first place. Pay attention to your child's reaction to the story, and stop if your child isn't enjoying it this time. You can always try a book, song or story another time.

If you don't have a book or can't make up a story on the spot, don't worry. There are many other ways you and your child can share letters, words and pictures. For example, you can look at:

- packages at home or in the supermarket, especially food packaging
- clothing – what does it say on the t-shirt? What colour is it?
- letters and notes – what do they say? Who sent them?
- signs or posters in shops, or on buses and trains – point out signs that have the same letters as your child's name
- menus – it can be fun for older children to look at menus and work out what they want to eat.

You could check out our storytelling videos. Let storyteller Anne E. Stewart introduce you and your child to [‘Mook Mook the owl’](#), [‘The crocodile’](#) and [‘The old lady and the mosquito’](#).

Tips for sharing books with babies and young children

- Make a routine and try to share at least one book every day. A reading chair where you're both comfortable can become part of your reading routine.
- Turn off the TV or radio, put your phone on silent, and find a quiet place to read so your child can hear your voice.
- Hold your child close or on your knee while you read, so your child can see your face and the book.
- Try out funny noises and sounds – play and have fun!
- Involve your child by encouraging talk about the pictures, and by repeating familiar words and phrases.
- Let your toddler choose the books when they're old enough to start asking – and be prepared to read your toddler's favourite books over and over again!

If you have older children, they can share books with your younger children, or you can all read together. Taking turns, asking questions and listening to the answers are all **important skills** that will help children when they start learning how to read.

Just reading for a few minutes at a time is good – you don't always have to finish the book. As children grow, they can usually listen for longer.

What sorts of books to read with your child

As a broad rule, young children often enjoy books, songs and stories that have **good rhyme, rhythm and repetition**. In fact, one of the ways that children learn is through repetition and rhyme.

Choose books that are the right length for your child and that match your child's changing interests.

For a guide to what might suit your child, you can look at the following articles:

- [Reading with babies from birth](#)
- [Reading with babies from 12 months](#)
- [Reading with toddlers](#)
- [Reading with preschoolers](#).

You can also **vary the books and printed materials you read**. Picture books, ebooks, magazines, instruction manuals, TV guides and letters can all be interesting and engaging for your child.

If you're interested in [ebooks](#), look for ones without distracting games or animations. And it's important to enjoy ebooks with your child, rather than leaving your child alone with a device.

If you want to try new books or magazines without much cost, you could arrange book swaps with friends, or with other parents at your parent group or early childhood centre.

Using your local library

[Libraries have a lot to offer](#). Getting to know your local library can be a part of learning about and loving books.

You can borrow great children's books for free from your local library. This means you can have plenty of books in your home for your child to explore – and it won't cost you a cent.

Taking your child to the library and letting them choose their own books can be a fun adventure. You can talk about and plan your trip to the library with your child, and get excited together. You could ask your child, for example:

- How many books will you choose?
- How many books can you find by your favourite author?
- Will you borrow books that have animals in them?
- Do you have a favourite book you'd like to borrow again?
- How many days will it be before we go to the library again?

Libraries also offer **story times** and activities for young children. Going along to these sessions is a way to help your child get familiar with the library, have fun and enjoy books and stories. Some libraries offer these sessions online.