**Read It! Write It! Rhyme It! Early Literacy Skills and Activities**

**Recommended by Heather McNeil, Youth Services Manager, Deschutes Public Library**

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**Print Awareness Activities**

1. Play Post Office. Create laminated postcards with simple messages on them. Child picks up a mail pouch, and delivers to the location printed on the card.
2. Read (or tell) a story that is very familiar, such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears.* Then ask the child to tell it back to you, while you print out the words in big letters on butcher paper. Then let them draw the pictures to match the words. This helps them to connect the fact that a story is made of words that can be printed into a book. As they get older, have them print as many of the words as they can.
3. If you are reading a story that has repetitive words, point them out. Print them out.
4. Hold up letters to form a word. Make it a simple word so you can have fun with it. For instance, after singing “Bingo,” hold up the letters you wrote on cards, B-I-N-G-O. Arrange them so it doesn’t make sense. “That word is BOING. Is that the dog’s name? Let’s try again.” Rearrange them so it’s sillier. “That word spells GONIB. Is that the dog’s name?” And so on, until you get to the right spelling.
5. Make a book together. Read a simple book that has a definite pattern, with plenty of repetition. *The Feel Good Book* by Todd Parr is one of my favorites. After reading it aloud, make your own “feel good” book, with your child identifying what makes her feel good and drawing the pictures, while you print out the words. If your child says, “Ice cream makes me feel good,” then she draws a picture of a bowl of ice cream, and you write out those exact words beneath the picture.
6. Have your child(ren) help you plan out the snack or lunch. They can “write” the menu. Create invitations; you print the words and they decorate. Fold index cards in half and make place cards for the table. It’s all about helping them understand that print has a purpose..
7. Make your child a photo album with a photo on the right, and the word on the left. Use photos of objects and people that are very familiar and special to your child.

**Vocabulary Activities**

**1.** Play the Word of the Day Game.

* Hang the word from the ceiling—Carrot.
* How about serving carrot muffins or carrot juice?
* Craft Time could be having the children draw Mr. and Ms. Carrot, dressing them up for the annual Vegetable Ball.
* Sing “10 Crunchy Carrots,” along with Charlotte Diamond on her CD, *10 Carrot Diamond*.
* Play “Guess the Food” game, with a bag from which you give hints about other nutritious foods, and when they guess it correctly, out it comes.
* End it with baby carrots for everyone to enjoy (assuming these children are old enough to chew a carrot.)
* Story Time focuses on food, with at least one story that features the Word of the Day, such as *Lunch* by Denise Fleming. Mouse has an undying hunger as he eats his way through “tasty orange carrots,” and ends with “juicy pink watermelon, crunchy black seeds and all.”

2. Play “25 Words.” You name a category, such as “animals with fur.” Then your child has to identify 25 in less than three minutes. As they get older, the categories get more difficult, such as “mammals” or “colors.” It’s easy to come up with 10 colors, but it really challenges their vocabulary to list 25.

3. Have an “I’m a Word” costume party. Children dress up to portray an unusual word, such as “mighty” (a heavily padded superhero with plenty of muscles?) or “tangled.” (lots of ribbons and yarn)

**4.** Read aloud *Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Did You Hear?* by Bill Martin, Jr. Then make up your own story, using the variety of stuffed animals before you. The important thing is to make a game out of thinking up words that describes the sound the animal makes. For instance:

I went to the zoo.

What did you see?

I saw a walrus garumphing at me.

Howling, screeching, warbling, chuckling--the more creative or unusual the words are that you choose, the more the child will remember. You could also do this with the movements of the animals--lolloping, zigzagging, lollygagging, barreling.

5. Make a paper body doll. Set them around the daycare, preschool or house in surprising places, with a new word in their hands. In the kitchen with “refrigerator” in her hands. In the bathroom with “toilet” in his hands. In the craft area with “crayon” in her hands.

**Phonological Awareness Activities (Rhyming and Playing With Words)**

1. Play “Monkey see, Monkey do.” “Monkey one. *(point to self)*  Monkey two. *(point to child)* Monkey see. *(circle fingers around eyes)* Monkey do!” Then model what you want your child to do, such as sit quietly with hands in laps, or pick up crayons.
2. Play “I Spy,” highlighting either rhymes or letter sounds. “I spy something that rhymes with jar.” (star)
3. Use nursery rhymes, and get creative with them. For instance:

Higglety Pigglety Pop! *(jump)*

The dog has eaten the mop.

The pig’s in a hurry, the cat’s in a flurry, *(run in place)*

Higglety Pigglety Pop! *(jump and clap)*

After you’ve both had fun with this one, change the Pop to Clap and see what they can think of to rhyme with it. The dog has eaten the map? The dog likes to rap? Change “hurry” to “The pig wants to jump,” and maybe they’ll think of “The cat likes to bump.” Gradually, you’ll make up an entirely different rhyme, with actions that they choose to match. And if the words are nonsense words, that doesn’t really matter. It makes it just that much more creative when they decide “The pig likes to snort.” (everyone snorts) “The cat likes to zort.” (everyone wiggles)

1. A simpler variation of playing with names is to clap the syllables, with the following nursery rhyme:

Heckedy Peckedy Bumble Bee

What is your name, please tell me.

*(point to child and she says her name, Melody)*

Me-lo-dy. *(clap with each syllable)*

Me-lo-dy. *(slap thighs with each syllable)*

Me-lo-dy. *(whisper)*

MELODY! (throw arms up high, and shout out the name)

1. Play a game of taking words apart. First, write the word “airplane” on two index cards, with “air” on one and “plane” on the other. Hold them up as one word, and as the children, “If I have the word “airplane,” and I take away the part that says “air,” what is left? “ As you ask this, you remove the card with “air” on it, and hide it behind your back. Continue with other two-syllable words that easily come apart, such as hotdog, yellow, and pinecone. Progress to more complicated versions, where the words come apart into pieces that don’t make sense on their own, such as chee-tah and pen-guin. Remove the last part sometimes and the first part sometimes. Then you can move on to three-syllable words. Remember to keep it a game, and celebrate with lots of enthusiasm when they get the idea.
2. Use the tune of “Oh, Do You Know the Muffin Man?,” and make up rhyming jingles. “Oh, have you seen a cat with a hat?/A cat with a hat?/A cat with a hat?/Oh, have you seen a cat with a hat?/Quite a sight to see!”
3. Make up a simple sentence about eating, leaving the last rhyming word open for the child to figure out. For instance, “Eat some cheese, and pat your \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” “Eat some bread and scratch your \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” “Eat a tomato then mash a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”
4. Have the children walk in a circle as you chant words that rhyme. When you say one that doesn’t rhyme, they all sit down. You don’t need to have every word be different; you can repeat the same words throughout the list. “Cat, rat, sat, cat, bat, mat, fat, cat, dog.”
5. Play CD’s of music, during snack, during clean up, as children wake up in the morning, before story time.
6. Sing the following and see how many verses you can come up with that rhyme.

“I had a little mouse who never would eat his cheese.

All he ever wanted to do was bounce upon my knees.

Bounce upon my knees, bounce upon my knees.

All he ever wanted to do was bounce upon my knees.”

“…cat who never would say please….squirrel who never would climb trees….dog who never would scratch his fleas….”

1. Begin and end story time with a series of pictures, encouraging the children to guess the rhyming words. I hold up a picture of a kangaroo, and say, “Howdy do—,” then pause until they call out, “kangaroo!” Here’s the whole set:

Howdy do, kangaroo.

Lookin’ fine, porcupine.

Hello, hello, buffalo.

Just say hi, pesky fly.

Glad to see ya, spotted cheetah.

Stay awhile, crocodile.

Stick around, basset hound.

Let’s begin, Penguin.

No more rhyme, it’s story time!

Close story time with another set:

See you later, alligator.

Wave goodbye, butterfly.

Give a hug, ladybug.

Blow a kiss, jellyfish.

See ya soon, raccoon.

Take care, polar bear.

Out the door, dinosaur.

Come again, dolphin.

No more rhyme, till next story time!

1. Jill Frankel Hauser describes the “Clap, Clap, Pat’ game in her book “*Wow! I’m Reading! Fun Activities to Make Reading Happen.”* First, practice with your child the pattern of clapping hands twice, then patting knees once. Then the adult says a rhyming word on the “Pat.” The child will go next, saying a word that rhymes. For instance, “Clap, clap, (pat) dish.” The child follows with, “Clap, clap, (pat) fish.”
2. Sing the following to the tune of “Skip to My Lou.” Do the action of the animal while you sing. Mouse—scurry. Cat—stretch. Dog—wag tail. Frog—jump.

Mouse, mouse, rhymes with house.

Mouse, mouse, rhymes with house.

Mouse, mouse, rhymes with house.

What will rhyme with frog?

**Narrative Skills Activities**

1. Encourage telling with crafts. By playing with paper bag or craft stick puppets, or with masks or headbands, they are remembering the tale.
2. Ask the child(ren) for a possible ending to a new story, or a different ending to a familiar story. When you are close to the end of a story, pause, and ask, “What do you think is going to happen?” Let the child’s imagination soar. Now finish reading the story and compare endings.
3. Try making up stories with your child(ren). It’s not as hard as you think. The adult begins with an opening line such as, “Once upon a time there was a---“, and then you pause. The child finishes the sentence. The adult agrees, with enthusiasm, “Yes, there was a dinosaur!” The adult continues with the beginning of the next sentence, such as, “This dinosaur had a problem because he was---.” “Scared!” says the child. If this is done with a classroom of children, you’ll need to make it clear whose turn is next to add to the story.
4. Purchase or make felt board pieces and allow children to play and make up their own stories.
5. After a field trip or walk around the neighborhood, write a book about the experience. Be sure to keep the happenings in order.
6. Encourage “show and tell.” Each time a child explains why she got a crown, or where he found the rock with holes in it, they are telling a story.

**26 Activities and 52 Books to Celebrate the Alphabet**

**Celebrating the Letter B**

1. Start the day with **b**ananas at **b**reakfast. Then have fun with Pam Schiller’s crazy rhyme,”Go Bananas.”

“Go Bananas”

Bananas unite! (*put hands together overhead)*

Bananas split! *(hands out to side)*

Go bananas! *(turn in circle, waving arms for next four lines)*

Go, go bananas!

Go bananas!

Go, go bananas!

Bananas to the left *(point left)*

Bananas to the right *(point right)*

Peel your banana and, mmmmm, take a bite! *(peel and bite banana)*

(Schiller, Pam. *Creating Readers: Over 1000 Games, Activities, Tongue Twisters, Fingerplays, Songs and Stories to Get Children Excited About Reading.* Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, 2001.)

1. Sing “I’m **B**ringing Home a **B**aby **B**umble**b**ee.”
2. Play **b**all or **b**low **b**ubbles.
3. Take a walk around the neighborhood. Look for things that begin with B. A **b**ridge? Someone playing **b**aseball? A **b**lack cat? A **b**ench? Write everything down, and when you get home or back to the care center, write down all the words. Have the children draw the pictures. Create a cover for their **B** **B**ook, punch 3 holes on the side, string yarn through, and, ta-dah! Each child has her very own **b**ook to take home and read.
4. Play “I Spy,” asking only for things that begin with B, or are a color that begins with B. Or, you can ask for the sounds of letters. “I Spy something that starts with the buh sound and we read it at story time.” Or, with older children, you could actually spell it out. “I Spy something that is spelled b-o-o-k.”
5. Have a treasure hunt. If this is at home, give your child a **b**ag. If it’s at the preschool, assign one child to carry the **b**ag, while others explore the room, add to the **b**ag anything they can find that begins with the letter of the day. Possibilities are a **b**arrette, a **b**rown hat, a teddy **b**ear, a **b**attery, and so on.
6. In the book *Wow! I’m Reading: Fun Activities to Make Reading Happen* by Jill Frankel Hauser is the following silly song game on page 41. Use the tune of “Old Macdonald Had a Farm.”

Bouncy Betty loves to say,

Banana, balloon, box.

Bouncy Betty loves to say,

Banana, balloon, box.

With a Buh Buh here and a Buh Buh there,

Here a Buh, there a Buh,

Everywhere a Buh buh.

Bouncy Betty loves to say,

Banana, balloon, box.

1. For lunch, have peanut **b**utter sandwiches and **b**lueberries.
2. Sing “The Rattlin’ Bog,” and ask for words that begin with **B.**

Chorus:

Hi, ho, the rattlin’ bog,

And the bog down in the valley, oh.

Hi, ho, the rattlin’ bog,

And the bog down in the valley, oh.

Now in that bog there was a tree,

A rare tree, a rattlin’ tree.

And the tree in the bog,

And the bog down in the valley, oh.

(Chorus)

Now on that tree there was a branch,

A rare branch, a rattlin’ branch.

And the branch on the tree,

And the tree in the bog,

And the bog down in the valley, oh.

(Chorus)

Now on that branch there was a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

A rare \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, a rattlin’ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

And the \_\_\_\_\_\_on the branch,

And the branch on the tree,

And the tree in the bog,

And the bog down in the valley, oh.

1. Play the “Suitcase” game. This is a word game that requires a good memory. Someone starts with, “I packed my suitcase and in it I put a ball.” The next person says the same beginning, has to remember all the words that came before and add one on. So the sentence might get to, “I packed my suitcase and in it I put a ball, a bat, a banana, a bear, a boat, and a boy.”
2. Play “Here’s My **B**ag.” I intersperse this attention grabber throughout story time. I fill a bag with objects that begin with our featured letter, such as a toy **b**ee, a **b**anana, a ladybug **b**eetle puppet, and a **b**all. I sing the following:

Here’s my bag with something inside.

What could it be?

I’ll pull it out so you can look.

Tell me what you see.

Sometimes I give hints and they have to guess. Sometimes they are objects within objects, such as a **b**ean inside a small **b**ag being held by a **b**ear. It’s amazing how this activity immediately quiets everyone down and refocuses them if they’ve gotten a little bit rowdy during story time.

1. Wear clothes that begin with the letter, either in color or name, such as **b**lack shoes, **b**lue jeans, and a **b**elt. At the school or library, just point out whoever is wearing something that matches the letter of the day. Or you could play “If You’re Wearing,” to the tune of, “Mary Had a Little Lamb.”

If you’re wearing blue today, blue today, blue today,

If you’re wearing blue today, please stand and jump.”

The child(ren) stands up, everyone claps, then you move on to something else that begins with B. “If you’re feeling **b**rave today…please stand and wiggle.” “If you have a teddy **b**ear…please stand and clap.”

1. Sing “My **B**onnie Lies Over the Ocean.” Begin with everyone sitting down. When a word begins with B, everyone stands up. The next time a word begins with B, everyone sits down. And so on, up and down throughout the song. It’s harder than you think, and always makes young and old laugh a lot.

My **B**onnie lies over the ocean,

My **B**onnie lies over the sea.

My **B**onnie lies over the ocean,

Oh, **b**ring **b**ack my **B**onnie to me.

**B**ring **b**ack, **b**ring **b**ack,

Oh, **b**ring **b**ack my **B**onnie to me, to me.

**B**ring **b**ack, **b**ring **b**ack,

Oh, **b**ring **b**ack my **B**onnie to me.

1. After nap, **b**ounce **b**alloons.
2. Play the CD that accompanies the book *Rhinoceros Tap* or *Philadelphia Chickens* by Sandra **B**oynton. Sing along with all the hilarious songs, including “**B**ad **B**abies,” “**B**arnyard Dance, and “Bellybutton”
3. When you’re out doing errands, play literacy games in the car. Look for the letter **b** on license plates, or road signs. Make up stories about the people in the next car, with everyone’s name beginning with the letter **b.** “Do you see that **b**lue car? Inside are **B**obbity, his wife, **B**ippity, and their little boy, **B**oo. They’re on their way to the **b**each so they can play **b**all and eat\_\_\_\_.” If your child is old enough, pause there and see if she can offer an idea, such as, “**b**agels!”
4. Play “Word Bird.” Help your child decorate a box, basket or bag to look like a bird. You sing the following, to the tune of “Frere Jacques:”

What’s the word

To feed Word Bird?

It starts with B

B sounds like Buh

It’s round and it rolls

It’s blue like the sky,

What’s the word

To feed Word Bird?

Your child guesses “Ball,” and gets to “feed” the Word Bird by putting the ball, or a card with the word on it, in the container. You can make this more difficult as your child gets older and wiser.

What’s the word

To feed Word Bird?

It ends with B

B sounds like Buh

It’s where your sister sleeps,

It’s where you used to sleep,

What’s the word

To feed Word Bird?

Your child guesses cri**b**.

1. Rename everyone and everything all day long by changing the first letter to B. For instance, toast becomes **b**oast. Amelia becomes **B**amelia. Grocery store becomes **b**rocery **b**ore. Dad becomes **B**ad! Again, harder than you think, but lots of silly fun.
2. Throughout the day read **b**ooks. Hooray! Some possibilities are *My Bear and Me* by Barbara Maitland, in which a curly haired girl describes all the reasons she loves her bear; *I Love* ***B****ugs* by Emma Dodd, with simple text about the **b**ugs in the **b**ackyard; *Teeny Weeny* ***B****op* by Margaret Read MacDonald, which is a cumulative tale of a lonely woman trading pets to find the right companion. I challenge you to keep a straight face as you read *Hello, My Name Is Bob* by Linas Alsenas, a tongue-in-cheek tale of a **b**oring **b**ear whose idea of a good time is to count toothpicks and dust plants. And sit. And sit. “Sitting is fun, isn’t it?”
3. Create the letter **B** in a variety of ways. Draw it with fingerpaint. Make it with several bodies lying on the floor. Create it with string. Trace it in pudding, then eat it up.
4. Make a collage. Cut out pictures of objects that begin with **b** from magazines and glue them into a giant **B** collage. Or, give the child an inexpensive disposable camera, have her take pictures all day, then get them printed to make the collage the next day.
5. Play with rhymes that have the letter **B** in them. Here’s one I made up for the story time I do with toddlers, using the tune to the first two lines of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

Bears, bears, everywhere bears.

Bears, bears, sitting on chairs,

Bears, bears, everywhere bears.

Bears, bears, climbing up stairs,

Bears, bears, everywhere bears.

Bears, bears, giving out stares.

Bears, bears, everywhere bears.

Bears, bears, combing their hairs,

Bears, bears, everywhere bears.

Bears, bears, everywhere bears.

1. Make up tongue twisters. **B**etty **b**rought **b**ears **b**ouncy **b**alls and **b**lue **b**ubbles.
2. *Wow! I’m Reading* by Jill Frankel Hauser is chock full of literacy games and activities. On page 83 she recommends making head bands with one letter printed all around the band, and decorations to match the letter. For instance, rainbows for the letter R, and stars for the letter S. I recommend taking it a step further. In a classroom setting you could have everyone wear their headbands and then see if they can find other letters to make a word. When they do, they stand together. It would require assistance from the teacher for the younger ones. “I want to put together the word “Bear. I need a B. Who has the Buh sound?” Keep at it until all four children have come together to create the word Bear. For older preschoolers, they might be able to gather up the right people on their own, especially if the word is on the board for them to see.
3. Play “What’s missing?” Occasionally say words they know very well, but leave out a letter. For instance, “We’re having peanut utter sandwiches today.” Or, Jimmy, I really like your lue jeans. “ When they yell out, “You mean blue jeans,” you help them figure out the missing letter.
4. Make giant capital letters and attach them to a craft stick. Choose one letter and brainstorm lots of words that begin with that letter. Seat the children in a circle, and pass the letter around as you sing the following, to the tune of “Skip To My Lou:”

B, B, the letter B,

B, B, sounds like “buh.”

B, B, the letter B,

B is the letter for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Whoever is holding the letter fills in the blank with a word that begins with the letter.

Three more games from “America Reads Challenge: Read\*Write\*Now!: Activities for Reading and Writing Fun.” <http://www2.ed.gov/Family/RWN/Activ97/index.html>:

1. Same Sounds Game. Write two sets of capital letters on index cards. Mix them up, then turn them face side down. Each person draws two cards, and identifies the sound of the letter. If the two match, you get to keep the cards. If not, the cards get mixed back into the pile. The goal of the game is to pick up all the cards.
2. Letter-Sound Grab bag. Place some of the above letter cards that your child is familiar with in a paper bag. Say “Start,’ and the child reaches into the bag, pulls out one card, and says the sound. He keeps picking cards until one minute is up. If he doesn’t know the sound, the letter goes back in the bag. The goal is to get more and more letters in one minute each time you play.
3. Letter Swap. Print out one simple word in large print. On another paper, print the same word, without the first letter. For instance, LOG on one paper, and \_\_OG on the other. Now print a set of letters on cards that could fit onto the blank in front of OG. Place the word LOG above the word \_\_OG. Explain to your child that she is to try and make new words with the letters you have printed out. She places them in the blank space, says the sound, and the new word. When this game becomes too simple, try doing the same with the end of the word, or the middle.