

EARLY LITERACY BOOK SELECTION GUIDE

Birth – 5 Years

Introduction

Books provide an opportunity for children to see, learn and imagine the lives of others as well as see themselves reflected through stories. Whether you're a healthcare provider, educator, or caregiver, thoughtful book selection can help make shared reading a joyful part of everyday life.

This guide is designed to support the selection of books for babies and young children from birth to five years of age.

Why Shared Reading Matters



Early literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and experiences children develop before learning to read and write. Reading, talking, singing, and sharing stories with babies and young children help build these foundational skills while strengthening the bond between children and their caregivers.

Shared reading provides meaningful opportunities to support early literacy, and choosing books that are engaging, developmentally appropriate, and reflect the diverse experiences of children and families can help enrich these experiences.



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Key Considerations When Choosing Books

We recommend books that:

Invite Interaction

Shared reading is most meaningful when children and caregivers talk, listen, and respond to one another.

Look for books that encourage children to participate by:

- Repeating words or phrases
- Singing or rhyming
- Pointing to pictures
- Asking questions
- Talking about what they notice

Build Early Literacy Skills

Look for books that support language development by introducing:

- New words and ideas
- Rhymes and repetition
- Letters and sounds
- Numbers, colours, shapes, and other early concepts

Wordless books are also wonderful tools, encouraging children and caregivers to create stories together and supporting families who speak different languages.

Support Social and Emotional Development

Shared reading can help children understand and talk about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Look for books that introduce themes related to:

- Feelings and emotions
- Empathy and kindness
- Confidence and self-expression
- Relationships and everyday interactions

Reflect Children's Lives and Experiences

Books offer children opportunities to see themselves reflected in stories, learn about others, and imagine new possibilities. Look for books that feature:

- Diverse cultures, identities, and languages
- Different family structures
- Children and adults with varying abilities
- Authentic stories told by creators with lived experience whenever possible

Meet Children Where They Are

For babies and young toddlers, consider books with:

- Bold or high-contrast illustrations
- Real photographs as well as illustrations
- Interactive features like textures or flaps
- Durable board book formats that can withstand repeated use

As children grow, look for books that:

- Tell longer stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Introduce more complex characters, feelings, and ideas
- Encourage children to think about what might happen next



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Additional Considerations

When choosing books for young children, you may also wish to consider whether a book:

- Models safe behaviours in everyday situations
- Uses clear, readable text and engaging illustrations
- Encourages curiosity, conversation, and imagination
- Follows the child's interests

**Download our
*Early Literacy Book
Recommendations***

