

Storytime Staples:

How to Choose the Perfect Storytime Book

Hello, my name is Bekah, and I am a Youth Librarian at Cedar Falls Public Library. One of my favorite activities at the library is storytime. I love being able to share my love of books and to promote pre-literacy skills, which are the things children know about reading and words before they can read, such as letter shapes and sounds. And the most important part of storytime—why we all gather—are the books. They are the beating heart of storytime, so I want to share a little bit about how to choose the perfect storytime books.

1. Choose books with vibrant pictures. Pictures absolutely help tell the story and will draw the eyes of your little one. If you are reading one-on-one, you can select books with busier pictures—the child will have ample time to investigate all the details of the pictures, but simple illustrations or photos work much better when you are reading to several children.

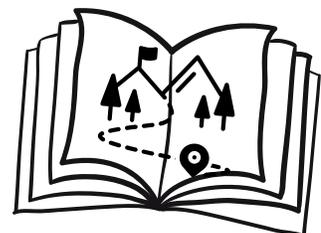
2. Find books with interactive elements, such as *Plant the Seed*, *Don't Press the Button*, or *There's a Dragon in this Book*. However, you can make a book interactive. For example, if there is a repeated phrase, have your little one say it with you. If there are animals, make animal noises together. Say, "Look, a pig. Let's oink like a pig" and then give some good snorts and oinks. Ask your little one questions throughout the story. This will help engage them with the story as well as improve their narrative skills.



3. Select books that play with language. Find the books that rhymes. Find books with alliterations, onomatopoeias, rhythms, tongue twisters. Babies' ears may not understand the words, but they'll begin to pick up the rhythm and sounds of language, which will help develop their attention span and give them the building blocks for later language development. Playful language can help toddlers and preschoolers develop auditory discrimination and recognize language patterns. Also, playful language is just fun! I love finding books that have BOOMS and STOMPS, and pitterpatters.



4. Find books with a Simple Narrative, a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end.



5. Find a book that is developmentally appropriate for your child.



For babies 0-24 months, choose books with very little text. I look for books with one word on a page to no more than 1-2 lines of text per page. Books with no text is also great. You can make up a story or add a commentary about the pictures, such as “Look at the sun! I think it must be summer. Where is that little girl going?” I already mentioned illustrations, but with babies, you really need to pick books with high contrast illustrations, like black and white books, which help with developing baby’s vision.

When choosing books for toddlers, again, select books with no more than 1–2 sentences per page. Toddlers have very little attention spans. Definitely find the books that promote movement and wiggling, like the book *Clap Your Hands!* By Lorinda Bryan Cauley. Also, board books are great for “little helpers” that want to turn the page but aren’t gentle enough for normal pages.



As your child gets older begin introducing longer, more complex books with more text on each page. The story can include more detail, descriptions, and complex sentences. Select books that encourage conversation. Ask your child what is going on in the book or to make predictions. Remember to give them time to respond. It’ll take them at least 5 seconds to answer.

According to Lisa Bintrim “Allowing preschoolers to respond to questions and prompts gives them the opportunity to practice their language skills and helps develop such skills as turn taking, attentive listening and creativity, which are important for language development and school readiness.”



I ♥ BOOKS

6. Read different genres. Read wordless books, nonfiction or informational books, fiction books, poetry, fairy tales, nursery rhymes. This will keep reading exciting and new.



7. Find books that will show familiar things, like families or animals. I like to call this 'looking in a mirror'. It's validating, empowering, and they will probably be attentive. However, also read diverse books. Let them look out the window to see how other people live. Show them people from various ethnic backgrounds and abilities.



8. Most of all, choose a book you like as well as books your child enjoys. Children need to see that reading is fun, so keep the interaction around the reading of a book positive and enjoyable. Don't feel like you need to read every single word on the page. It is okay to summarize. It is okay just to talk about the pictures or to ask them what they think is going to happen. It's okay if your child wanders away.



9. Repeat favorites!

10. Your child loves you. They love your voice. You don't have to be perfect. Don't feel bad if your little one isn't feeling storytime. Try again later. Take the time to enjoy being with each other, to hold your dear one close, to laugh, sing, play, and read together.

