

Kindergarten Reading: What Should Parents Know?

By Heidi Butkus

Most children are taught to read in Kindergarten these days, and this is now a fact that is a big surprise to many parents, who have fond memories of blocks, painting, stories, play dough, and play time from their own experiences in Kindergarten! Personally, I distinctly remember singing (what else, LOL!) in Kindergarten, my lovely teacher's name (Mrs. Brazil!), playing on the playground, and little else. But the reality is that children are now expected to learn the basics of reading in Kindergarten, and those wonderful memories adults may have of their earliest school experiences are now activities that are mostly done in preschools instead of Kindergartens, I'm sad to say!

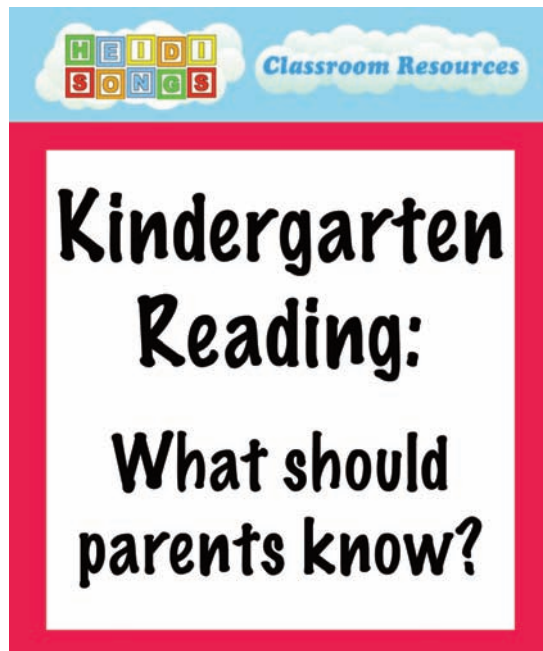
So what can parents do to prepare their children to learn to read in Kindergarten? And if your preschool child is advanced, what can you do to help your child get ahead, and stay there? Here are some ways to help prepare your child so that he or she can be ready to learn to read when the time comes.

Preparing Your Child to Learn to Read in Kindergarten

1. READ to Your Child for at Least 20 Minutes Daily- and TALK About What You've Read!

Research shows that children that are read to daily have larger vocabularies and develop better listening comprehension skills. In fact, there is a wealth of research that supports the fact that parents are children's first and most important teachers! When children understand what their parents are reading aloud, this leads to them eventually understanding better what they are going to read to themselves. They also start to learn what the letters of the alphabet look like, and often pick up skills such as rhyme and beginning sounds, etc., which are incredibly important to beginning readers!

I also recently stumbled across this brochure online called, "Rhymers Are Readers: The Importance of Nursery Rhymes." (<http://www.kbyutv.org/kidsandfamily/readytolearn/file.axd?file=2011%2F3%2F2+Rhymers+are+Readers-Why+Important.pdf>)



Rhymers Are Readers is a wonderful explanation of how nursery rhymes help children get ready to read. It's short, easy to read, FREE, and I highly recommend that you take a look. The arguments that they make really hold true for most quality children's books as well! When children listen to books with rhyming words in them and start to memorize them, these children quickly become readers!

Children should have plenty of books at home to read! Don't forget that they are FREE to borrow at your local public library! Also, remember that books make great gifts for every holiday! How many plastic toys laying around the house does your child really need, anyway? Let relatives know that if they are not sure what to get your child for any holiday, that books are always welcome! Just ask a children's librarian or whomever is in charge of the children's section at a book store for the current "favorite" book for the child's age or grade level, and you're sure to get a great one.

2. Teach Your Child the Alphabet and Letter Sounds

We used to learn the alphabet and sounds in Kindergarten, but now if your child doesn't already know these things on the first day of school, he or she is already behind! The Common Core State Standards tell us that the children are supposed to learn to read words with long and short vowels (short vowel word: "mat;" long vowel word: "mate,") common sight words, and write short paragraphs by the end of the year! Common sense will tell you that this won't happen very easily if your child doesn't know the alphabet and letter sounds. Some children may be able to identify a few basic words without knowing the alphabet, such as names of family members and pets, but your child won't get far in Kindergarten reading without at least knowing the sound of each letter. Children can learn this at home, without ever attending preschool! Certainly preschool makes it easier, but if you cannot afford to send your child to preschool, there are plenty of things you can do at home to help! One easy way to get started is simply by using the Singable Songs for Letters and Sounds DVD, available at HeidSongs.com. Plus, there are plenty of other support materials on the website as well!

Children should know letter sounds automatically and quickly- just as easily as they can tell you their favorite color or flavor of ice cream! Any time that it takes for your child to "think of the answer" is brain power that cannot be given to comprehension (understanding what you're reading,) and that's a HUGE problem! The goal should be to be able to tell thirty letter sounds in thirty seconds. That's a sound a second! So in other words, your child needs to have them memorized and have them DOWN.

Be Careful Teaching the Vowel Sounds!

Aa Sounds
Like "Apple"

Ii Sounds
Like "Inchworm"

Uu Sounds
Like "Umbrella"

Oo Sounds
Like "Octopus"

Ee Sounds
Like "Elephant"

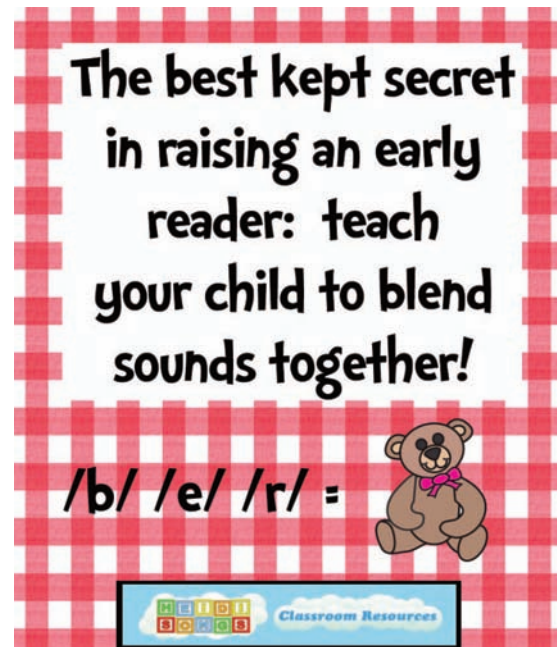
Heidi Butkus Classroom Resources

Also, be VERY careful in teaching your child the correct sounds of each letter- especially the vowel sounds! The short vowel sounds can be tricky to isolate and reproduce for people that are not teachers, and especially for those that did not grow up with English as their first language. After 25 years of experience teaching children to read, I can tell you that once a child internalizes the WRONG letter sound, it can be extremely hard to correct! And a child that mixes up the "i" sound for the "e" sound will read "bit," instead of "bet," etc. If it is not corrected by the end of first grade and the child is continually guessing at the words, then longer words like "habitually" and "encyclopedia" will be nearly impossible to tackle, because readers need to sound out these long words one syllable or part at a time. Anyone that isn't sure of the letter sounds will be just plain stuck.


3. Start Teaching Your Child to Blend Sounds Together EARLY


One of the hardest things that beginning readers face is just learning to take three sounds and put them together to make a word. For example, take the sounds /m/ /u/ /g/: put them together, and you get the word "mug." Your child can learn to do the sound blending part of this task without EVER needing to LOOK at a single letter! All he or she needs to do is listen to the letter sounds that an adult makes, and listen to that adult put the sounds together to make a word. Just make a guessing game out of it! For example you could say, "I spy a toy in the room that rolls, and it's a /t/ /r/ /u/ /k/." (Notice, I'm NOT spelling the word aloud. I'm saying the letter sounds aloud!) Then the child tries to use both the clues about the toy AND the sound blending clues to guess the toy. Get it? This game can be played ANYWHERE at all, and requires no flash cards and nothing special at all- just the power of speech!

I always tell parents at the beginning of the school year that one of the biggest secrets for nurturing an early reader is teaching the child to blend sounds together. That way, once the child knows the letter sounds, it is simply a matter of using the sound blending skills that he already has, but in print. In my opinion, one of the biggest mistakes that many Kindergarten teachers make that could really make a difference in their students' end of the year reading achievement is just waiting to teach their class sound blending until the whole class knows all of the letters and sounds. The skill of sound blending does not depend on knowledge of the letter sounds, so there is no reason to wait to teach it. It's also one of the most difficult bridges to cross for many children, so the earlier you start, the better!



**The best kept secret
in raising an early
reader: teach
your child to blend
sounds together!**

/b/ /e/ /r/ = 



Besides the "I Spy Sound Blending Game" I mentioned above, another very easy way to get your child started on blending sounds together is by just using the HeidiSongs Sound Blending Songs for Word Families DVD. This is especially good for children that are active, musical learners, and for those that benefit from the visual aid of the screen. Kids get up and sing and move along while learning to blend those sounds together, which is a whole lot more fun than being given a dry, boring reading lesson any old day! It also matches up completely with our CVC book Vol. 1, so if your child is ready to write some of those words and you want him or her to do worksheets with them, you're all set.

4. Teach Your Child a Few Basic Sight Words

Sight words are words that cannot be sounded out because they don't follow normal phonics spelling patterns, so beginning readers must learn to recognize them "on sight," such as "the," "said," and "here." They are also often called, "High Frequency Words," or "Popcorn Words" since they pop up all over the place! Beginning readers won't get very far while reading unless they know at least a few basic sight words. Nobody seems to agree on which sight words should be taught first, but one expert, Edward Dolch, PHD., came up with a list of sight words in the order of frequency that are used in the English language, according to his research. You can download a list of these words here.

A nice, easy way to teach the sight words to active learners through music and movement is simply by putting on one of the HeidiSongs Sing and Spell the Sight Word DVD's, and letting your child sing and dance along! I also really like the method of "trapping" kids in the car with either an instructional DVD or CD playing, and letting them absorb the content, like it or not! This can be especially effective for the reluctant learner, because before they know it, they are singing along and learning in spite of themselves! LOL! I have had children with Oppositional Defiance Disorder (O.D.D.) who have flourished with the CD just playing in the background, even though the child never actually showed any effort to try or to learn. The child I'm thinking of just "soaked it in" in sort of a passive way. Learning is slower when there is no effort on the part of the child, no doubt. BUT, once the child experiences some success, often he or she will agree to try. (Parents, if you don't know what O.D.D. is, consider yourself lucky! And you can read about it here if you would like to know what you can be thankful for that your child probably doesn't have: <http://psychcentral.com/disorders/oppositional-defiant-disorder-symptoms/>)

5. Once your child begins to learn to read, make sure you listen to your child read aloud daily.

After your child begins learning to read, it is absolutely IMPERATIVE that you listen to your child practice reading at home, every single day! One study found that "children who read to their parents on a regular basis made greater gains than children receiving an equivalent amount of extra reading instruction by reading specialists at school." (Tizard,

Schofield, & Hewison, 1982). This means that when parents just sit and LISTEN to their children read, they can make an even bigger difference than if the child went to a reading specialist for the same amount of time! And let's face it- it's WAY cheaper!!! It just takes patience. Here is a blog post that will give you some more, really GREAT reasons to listen to your child read for at least 20 minutes per day. It's called, "Why Your Child Should Read for 20 Minutes Each Day."

(<http://www.heidisongs.com/blog/2008/09/why-your-child-should-read-for-20.html>)

I think that the reason why listening to your child read make such a difference is that your child knows that it is important to you that they learn to read. I firmly believe that children spell "love" T-I-M-E. The way that they know you care about them the most is by spending time with them- no matter what. Your time matters much more than whether or not you pay a tutor or reading specialist to help your child. Your child wants to know how important it is to YOU that they put forth the effort to learn to read. And children who struggle to learn to read need their parents approval, time, and attention more than any other child. Otherwise, their self-esteem drops so low that they start to act out at school and become discipline problems! So EVEN IF you need to pay a reading specialist or tutor to help your child, this does NOT release you of the responsibility of listening to your child read at home! Some children have even been known to "fake" being poor readers, just to win a bit of time and attention from their parents. And that's kind of sad, isn't it?

That being said, if your child is having trouble following the rules at school, try this as an experiment: spend an extra half an hour of quality time with your child each day, (like reading, playing games, building with legos, etc.) and see if the problem stops. Sometimes, that's all it takes! Young children often don't know how to tell us in words what is bothering them, such as, "I miss spending time with you now that I am at school all day!" Is there a problem at school? Love your child a little more in a tangible way (give them a little bit more time) and see if that solves it. It's entirely possible that it is nothing more than that! And it's important to realize that if this DOES solve the problem, it doesn't mean you are a bad parent. It just means that your child needs more of your time than you thought in order to thrive.

I hope you enjoyed this article! If you did, be sure to look up the HeidiSongs Resource blog at www.HeidiSongs.com/blog. You can also follow this blog on Bloglovin', and keep in touch with us on [Pinterest](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Google+](#) and [YouTube](#), too!

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