

Rhyme and Alliteration

When you use language, you most often pay attention to the meaning of the words. However, to be successful in the early stages of reading, children also have to learn to pay attention to the *sounds* of letters and words. This is because reading English requires matching sounds-”*buh*”-with specific marks on paper-”*b*”-the letters of the alphabet.

Young children who have had adults help them learn to pay attention to the sounds of language develop what is called *phonemic awareness* and are at a distinct advantage when they start school.

Children who have had caring adults spend lots of time playing with and enjoying the sounds of letters and words with them are particularly fortunate. Every time you chant along to a favorite children’s rhyme or read aloud from a book like *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* (by Dr. Seuss), you are helping your child develop phonemic awareness, a critical early literacy skill.

Preschoolers who learn alliteration and rhyming gain literacy skills needed for school readiness.

The easiest forms of phonemic awareness are rhyming and alliteration. Rhyming is learning to recognize and use words that sound the same at the end (for example, *bad, mad, sad*). Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds (for example, *feel, fine, finally*). Besides supporting early literacy, rhymes and alliteration can soothe, entertain, and foster a positive attitude toward reading.

Rhyming

Children learn better and faster when rhyme is used from an early age. Rhymes are pleasing to the ear and they build listening skills which are helpful for later reading comprehension. Learning to manipulate words through rhyming and word games is an important reading skill. Rhymes also delight children and they are an introduction to the music and fun of language.

Nursery rhymes, lullabies, finger plays, and bath time songs can all offer simple rhymes and verses to delight your preschooler. Repeat your child’s favorite rhymes over and over again and invite your preschooler to chant them with you.

Enjoy fun rhyme activities with your preschooler. Share a string of words that rhyme such as *fish, dish, wish*. See if your preschooler is able to rhyme words with a word you say: ball (fall, haul, call, tall). Applaud your preschooler’s efforts even if the word they provide isn’t a real word—getting the rhyme is what you want.

Read a rhyming book you both enjoy. Stop before the end of a sentence and let your child supply the rhyming word, like in this example from Dr. Seuss’ *Green Eggs and Ham*: “I will eat them with a fox. I will eat them in a ____.” Again, don’t worry whether your child suggests the exact word provided in the book. Sometimes the silliest rhyming word is the most fun.

Reading or singing the same rhyme over and over helps children internalize the rhythm and hear the rhyme. One example that appeals to many young

children is the Banana Fana chant. For a child named Andrew, it would go like this:

Andrew, Andrew,
Bo Bandrew,
Banana fana fo fandrew,
Me, my, mo mandrew;
Andrew.

Alliteration

The nursery rhyme “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers” is a great example of alliteration, where initial sounds are repeated in neighboring words. For young children, alliteration of consonants is usually the easiest place to start, as used in clichés such as sweet smell of success, a dime a dozen, bigger and better, and jump for joy.

Help your preschooler recognize words that start with the same consonant sound such as *Sally sells seashells by the seashore*. Later on you can try initial vowel alliterations such as *Eels eat eagerly*. Alliteration is a great help to memory. It’s a powerful device that helps us remember such phrases as sink or swim, do or die, the more the merrier, watchful waiting, hale and hearty, and live and learn.

Use your child’s name to make up an alliteration. Your preschooler will find it delightful. For example:

Polly picked pears.
Yolanda yodeled yesterday.
Brett bought bottles.
Hillary hired hippos.

Tongue twisters can also be used to illustrate and practice alliteration. Start with simple ones. Then add repetitions or length to make them more challenging.

Bertha blew big, blue bubbles.
Greta Gruber grabbed a group of grapes.
Julie Jackson juggled the juicy, jiggly jello.
Karl Kessler kept the ketchup in the kitchen.

Alliteration Picnic. You and your child can come up with descriptors that have the same starting sound as the foods you are eating. Examples to get you started:

Tasty Tomatoes
Leafy Lettuce
Sassy Strawberries

Finish short sentences with alliterative words. Ask your child to come up with words that have the same starting sound. For example:

Funny (___fish, farmer___).
Many (___men, monkeys___).
Zany (___zoo, zebra___).

Be sure to check your local library or bookstore to find books with rhyme or alliteration that you and your child enjoy. Here are some to consider:

Each Peach Pear Plum by Janet and Allan Ahlberg
Jamberry by Bruce Degen
Laughing Out Loud: Poems to Tickle Your Funny Bone by Jack Prelutsky
Miss Mary Mach and Other Children’s Street Rhymes by Joanna Cole and Stephanie Calmenson
Peanut Butter and Jelly: A Play Rhyme by Nadine Bernard Westcott
Sheep in a Jeep by Nancy Shaw
Sing a Song of Popcorn: Every Child’s Book of Poems by Beatrice Shenk de Regniers
The Twentieth Century Children’s Poetry Treasury by Jack Prelutsky
Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shell Silverstein



Sources:

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