



# EARLY LITERACY

## Building Healthy Brains

AGES 4 TO 6 YEARS



**Empower  
Simcoe**  
BE • BELONG • THRIVE

**Early ON**

Child and Family Centre



## HOW DOES LEARNING HAPPEN?

Learning is organized around four foundational conditions that are important for children to grow and flourish: Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement, and Expression. These foundations, or ways of being, are conditions for children’s future potential and a view of what they should experience each and every day.

These four foundations apply regardless of age, ability, culture, language, geography, or setting. They are aligned with the Kindergarten program. They are conditions that children naturally seek for themselves.

A focus on these foundations across all aspects of early years programs promotes optimal learning and healthy development.



## QUESTIONS

If you have questions about this booklet please contact the EarlyON Early Literacy Specialist.

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# EARLY LITERACY

## BUILDING HEALTHY BRAINS

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“Experts in literacy and child development have discovered that if children know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they’re four years old, they’re usually among the best readers by the time they’re eight.”  
Mem Fox, Reading is Magic

# Reading Log

Read 1000 books before kindergarten!  
Begin tracking your journey

	Title		Title
1		26	
2		27	
3		28	
4		29	
5		30	
6		31	
7		32	
8		33	
9		34	
10		35	
11		36	
12		37	
13		38	
14		39	
15		40	
16		41	
17		42	
18		43	
19		44	
20		45	
21		46	
22		47	
23		48	
24		49	
25		50	

Reading 1,000 books with your child before they start Kindergarten helps build literacy skills and prepares them for school. If you read just one book a night, that's 365 in a year, 730 in two years and 1,095 in three years. The concept is simple, the rewards are priceless.



# What is Early Literacy?

Early literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they actually learn to read and write. It is not teaching reading, drilling or using flashcards. Instead, it is laying the foundation, so that your child has the necessary skills when they are developmentally ready to read. (Johnson County Public Library, 2024)

YOU make a difference in your child's early literacy development. Every Child Ready to Read (2024) identified five practices you can do with your child preparing them to enter school ready to learn to read. Find opportunities to sing, talk, read, write, and play WITH your child, equipping them with the skills they need to become a reader.



## Read WITH Me

Reading together develops vocabulary and comprehension, nurtures a love for reading and motivates children to want to read.



## Talk WITH Me

Talking with your child helps them learn oral language, one of the most critical early literacy skills. Children learn about language by listening to their parents talk and joining in conversation.



## Sing WITH Me

Singing develops language skills. It slows down language so your child can hear different sounds in words. It also introduces new words and information.



## Write WITH Me

Your child will become aware that printed letters stand for spoken words as they see print used in their daily lives.



## Play WITH Me

Play is one of the best ways for your child to learn language and literacy skills. Playing provides opportunities for your child to put thoughts into words when they discuss what they are doing.

# Library Visits

“Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.”

Emilie Buchwald



## Benefits of Visiting

Stay motivated to read aloud with your children by visiting the library regularly.

Variety is key! Let your child choose 10 books they would like to read with you AND you select 10 books to read to them.

It's not just the books you read, it's the conversations you have while reading that make a difference!



## Take Your Time

Children's books have 50% more rare or unique words in them than does the regular conversation of two university graduates. Stop often to explain and describe new words, and your children will develop a vocabulary to last a lifetime!

## Library Programs

Library Programs for children aged 0-5 years are designed to promote early literacy and learning. These programs include storytime sessions, sing-alongs, and interactive playtime activities that help children learn new words, develop their vocabulary, and enhance their abilities. Be sure to take advantage of the fantastic programs offered by your local library.



## Library of Things

Each local library has a "Library of Things." This is a selection of unique items and resources that you can access for free with your library card. From musical instruments to snowshoes and games galore, be sure to explore!

**Read Aloud 15 MINUTES**  
Every child. Every parent. Every day.

**DOES READING ALOUD REALLY MATTER? YES!**

**More than one in three** children arrive at kindergarten without the skills necessary for lifetime learning.

Research shows that reading aloud is the single most important thing you can do to help a child prepare for reading and learning.

**LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**  
The number of words that a child knows on entering kindergarten is a key predictor of his or her future success.

**LITERACY SKILL BUILDING**  
Vocabulary. Phonics. Familiarity with the printed word. Storytelling. Comprehension. Reading aloud builds literacy skills.

**WHY READ ALOUD?**

**INSTILL A LOVE OF READING**  
Your example demonstrates that reading is important, pleasurable and valued.

**BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**  
From birth to age 3 are critical years in the development of language skills.

**KNOWLEDGE GAINED & SHARED**  
Books are a pleasure, yes, and they are also informative. You and your child can learn something new as you read aloud.

**BONDING**  
Is anything better than sharing a good book?

**DON'T GOOD PARENTS ALREADY READ ALOUD DAILY? NO**

More than 15% of young children, 3.1 million, are read to by family members fewer than three times a week.

Only 48% of young children in this country are read to each day.

Reading 15 minutes every day for 5 years:  
**27,375 MINUTES**

**IS 15 MINUTES ENOUGH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE? YES!**

**456.25 HOURS**



# Canadians Read Aloud

## READING ALOUD AT HOME

Percentage of parents with kids ages 0–5 who started reading aloud to their child before

**35%** **70%**

**3 MONTHS OLD** **AGE 1**

Percentage of parents with kids ages 3–5 reading aloud to their child 5–7 days a week

**65%**

**KIDS AGES 3–5**



The frequency of parents reading aloud 5–7 days a week decreases dramatically after ages 5 and 8

**41%**

**KIDS AGES 6–8**

**16%**

**KIDS AGES 9–11**



**58%** of kids ages 6–8 want reading aloud to continue

## PARENTS ARE READING SEVERAL BOOKS ALOUD

Percentage of parents with kids ages 0–5 who read aloud to at least weekly, and who read more than one book each time

**61%**



## THE POWER OF CHOICE

Percentage of kids who are read aloud to at least weekly who pick their own books

**73%**



## KIDS & PARENTS WHO SHARED READ-ALoud TIME ENJOY IT!

**87%**

**KIDS AGES 6–11 & THEIR PARENTS**  
LOVE(D) OR LIKE(D) READ-ALoud TIME

**86%**

**90%**

**OF PARENTS WITH KIDS AGES 0–5**  
ALSO AGREE



## Keep Up the Great Work Canada!






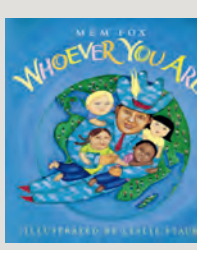


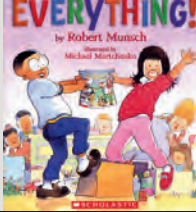
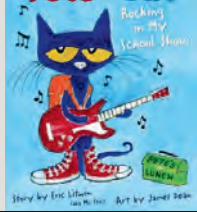
Books Canadian Children read aloud over and over again

Caillou **Dr. Seuss** Cinderella  
The Bible  
**Robert Munsch**  
The Gruffalo **Disney Harry Potter**  
The Very Hungry Caterpillar  
**Goodnight Moon** **Winnie the Pooh**  
Batman



# Favourite Books for 4-6 Year Olds

Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion at the Hospital for Sick Children recommends books that are about school preparation, use pictures for words, science themed, inclusive of concepts such as appreciation, rhyming and folk tales. (The Hospital for Sick Children Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion, 2023)

	<p>There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Dragon! By Lucille Colandro</p>		<p>Our Table By Peter H. Reynolds</p>
	<p>How Do Dinosaurs Stay Safe? By Jane Yolen</p>		<p>The Kissing Hand By Audrey Penn</p>
	<p>Llama Llama Red Pajama By Anna Dewdney</p>		<p>Whoever You Are By Mem Fox</p>
	<p>Sometimes I Kaploom By Rachel Vail</p>		<p>The Day the Crayons Quit By Drew Daywalt</p>
	<p>We Share Everything By Robert Munsch</p>		<p>Pete the Cat Rocking in My School Shoes By Eric Litwin</p>



# REFRAME THE BEHAVIOUR

"KIDS DO WELL IF THEY CAN"  
~ ROSS GREENE



"SEE A CHILD DIFFERENTLY, YOU SEE A DIFFERENT CHILD"  
~ Dr. Stuart Shanker

When kids exhibit challenging behaviour we can be "STRESS DETECTIVES"... finding and removing barriers.

- FIND STRESSORS → REDUCE THEM
- FIND UNMET NEEDS → MEET THEM
- FIND SKILLS DEFICITS → TEACH THEM

@kwiens62

BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION!





# Understanding Emotions

Children begin to explore and understand emotions from birth, supported by interactions with their caregivers.



## THE FEELING IS MUTUAL

Children seek guidance from other people to inform their emotions and behavior, especially in new or unfamiliar situations. This is called social referencing.



### TRY THIS!

When your child tries something new, adjust your expression and tone of voice to show encouragement and to help them feel safe. Smile and say, "You're okay! You've got this!" Wave and say, "You're doing great, I'm right here!"



## A STATE OF MIND

Children are always watching and listening. They are sensitive to the emotions of others, even when they are not directly involved in the interaction.



### TRY THIS!

When disagreements arise with other adults, model good problem-solving skills. Respond with understanding. Say, "I'm sorry, I can see I upset you." Then, model next steps. Say, "I'll work on \_\_" and, "Next time, let's try \_\_."



## SET THE STAGE

Children begin to manage their own emotions and behaviors in the second year of life. This is called self-regulation. Children learn regulation strategies from adults.



### TRY THIS!

Play helps children practice self-regulation. Engage in dramatic play with your child. Guide the characters through conflict resolution and complex emotions. Play games like "Red light, Green light" to practice impulse control.

Visit  
[outreach.ilabs.uw.edu](https://outreach.ilabs.uw.edu)  
For more free resources  
and information

INSTITUTE FOR  
LEARNING  
& BRAIN  
SCIENCES



# Is she getting enough face time with you?

Young children learn best by interacting face-to-face with caring adults. Not with screens.

Make time for reading, singing, dancing, arts and crafts, and playing outside.

## Limit screen time

- Under 2 years old: No screen time
- 2 to 5 years old: Less than 1 hour per day

## Tune in to kids

- Turn off screens when no one is watching
- Turn off screens at least 1 hour before bed
- Watch with your children
- Choose content that is right for their age
- Set limits when children are young
- Be a good role model: Limit your own screen time, especially around your children

More info: [www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)



Canadian  
Paediatric  
Society

**caring for kids**  
cps.ca  
Information for parents from Canada's paediatricians



# Mind



## Screen Time

### Screen time can include time in front of a TV, gaming console, computer, tablet or cell phone.

Children can learn many good things from technology, but learn more from spending time with you. Technology can take away from time that could be spent playing and being with family. Children that have too much screen time are at risk for becoming overweight, sleep-deprived, less school-ready, less attentive, and less able to self-soothe. Very little physical energy is exerted during screen time.

### Set Limits to Screen Time

Setting limits to screen time helps build healthy habits for the future. It is important to create rules and to share these rules with other adults in your child's life. For your child's safety when using tablets, computers or phones, look for apps that provide parental controls which can help block sites and enforce time limits.

Screen time for children younger than 2 years is not recommended. For children aged 2 to 5 years, limit routine or regular screen time to less than 1 hour per day.

### Be a Good Example

Set a good example by modeling healthy screen time habits. Cell phones and other devices take your attention away from your child which can be dangerous. Your child is more likely to act-out in order to get your attention when you are distracted. Engaging your child using play and books is better for your child's brain and social development than screens.

### Creating Healthy Habits

Keeping devices in a common area can help you control when and how your child uses screen time. It is important for you to know how your child is using technology. Screens and television programs that are not meant for children can

have a negative effect on their development. Watch and talk to your child while they are using screens. Choose content that is right for your child's age. Turn off screens one hour before bed to help your child fall asleep easier. Turn off screens during mealtimes and other times when they are not necessary.

**i** Let your child know that they are more important than your device.



For more information about *Nobody's Perfect*, or to download this document, please search "Nobody's Perfect Tipsheets" on [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca).



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé  
publique du Canada

Canada



# Pre-Printing Skills

Why are pre-printing skills important? Before children are successful at writing letters or numbers, children need to be able to copy the basic strokes for drawing.

## What are the pre-printing strokes?



Vertical line

Horizontal line

Circle

Cross

Diagonal line

Square

"X"

Triangle

## Playing with Pre-Printing

Add a dash of fun by including a variety of materials when practicing pre-printing skills. Here are some ideas:



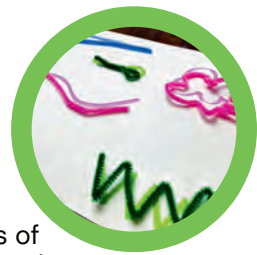
Cover an old cookie sheet with salt, rice, sand, pudding, or shaving cream, etc. Practice drawing shapes with a finger or Q-tip.

Draw in the sand at the park.



Fill a large Ziploc bag with conditioner or hair gel and draw shapes on the surface of the bag with a finger.

Draw with shaving cream or soap suds in the tub.

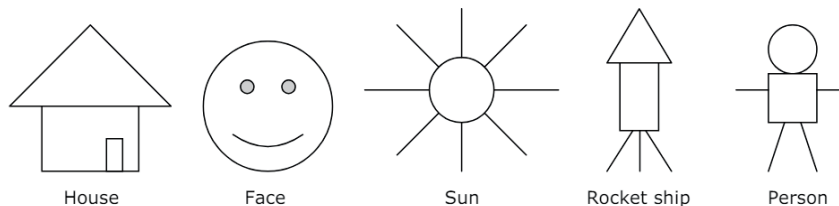


Construct shapes using pieces of string, pipe cleaners, clay, playdough, etc.



Draw on the sidewalk with chalk or a paintbrush and water

Once your child has learned how to draw the basic shapes, they can begin to combine them to create simple pictures on their own. For example:



House

Face

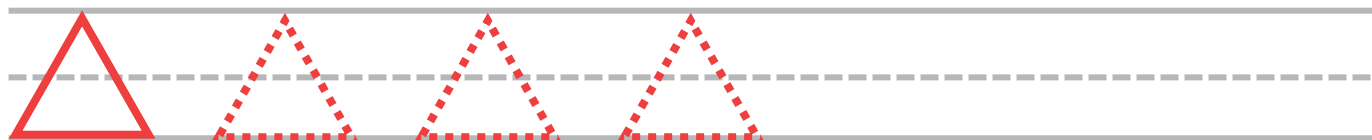
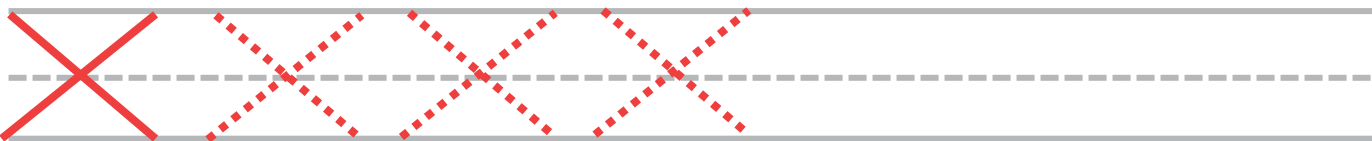
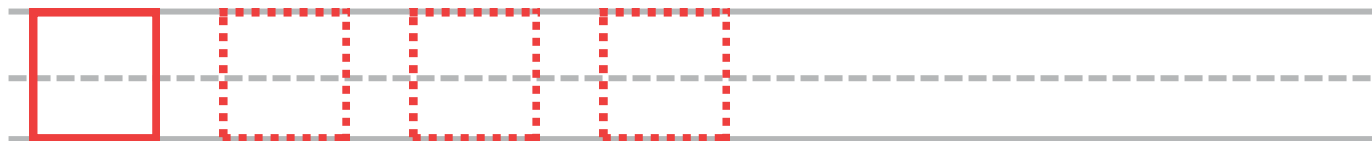
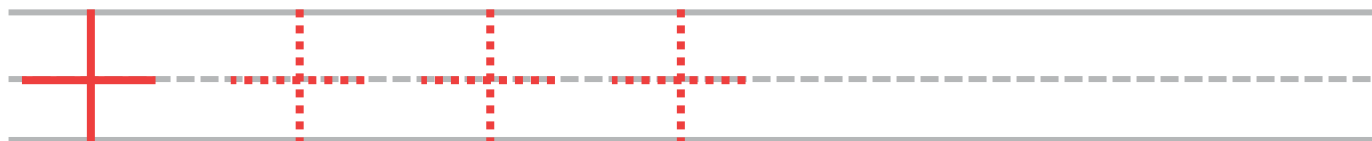
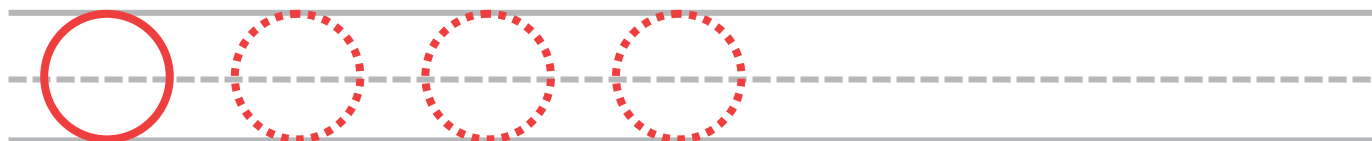
Sun

Rocket ship

Person

# Pre-Printing Practice

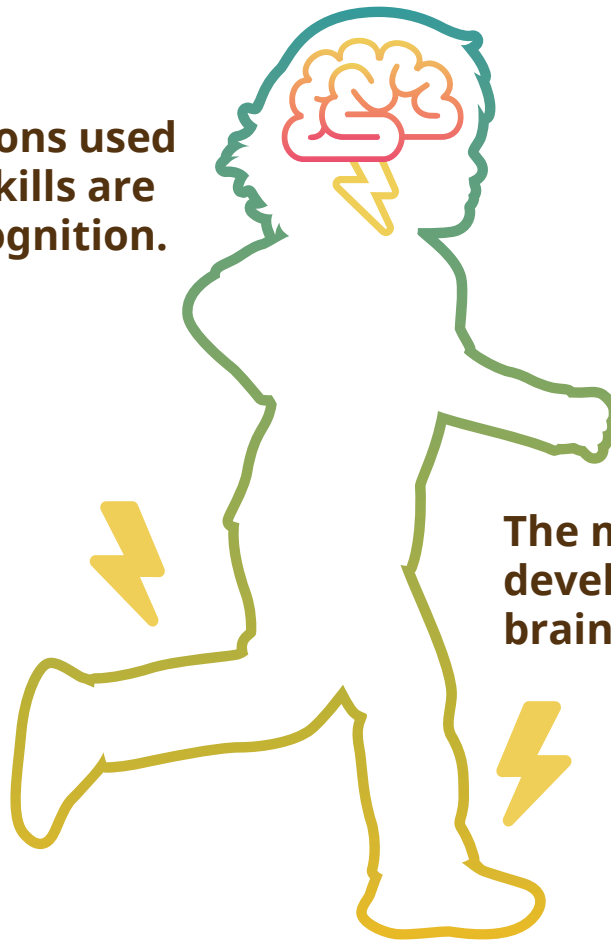
Encourage and help your child to practice their pre-printing strokes on this page.



# Active play in the early years

Children need physically active play every day for healthy development. Better movement skills mean better brain development and school readiness.

**The brain regions used for motor skills are also used in cognition.**



**The more motor development, the more brain development.**



Children with strong motor development do better in school.



Remember, active play is more than simple fun. It's how young children learn, and it's an essential part of their holistic development.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.



# Enjoy active play, every day.

Kids need active play every day, and there are plenty of ways to keep active at home. Each day, select at least one option from each category below.

## 1. Go play outside

- play hide and go seek
- roll down a hill
- jump in puddles
- build a fort
- get muddy
- run through a sprinkler
- make an obstacle course



## 2. Have fun developing skills

- play beanbag or sock ball catch with a parent or sibling
- practice yoga postures and balance poses
- dribble a basketball or shoot hoops outside
- play sock ball soccer indoors
- throw sockballs into a hamper
- play hopscotch
- jump rope



## 3. Use your feet to get around

- walk
- run
- bike
- scooter
- skateboard
- rollerblade



## 4. Do a family activity

- dance party
- after dinner walk
- geocaching
- bike ride

## 5. Help around the house

- make your bed
- take out the garbage
- pick up toys
- fold laundry
- rake leaves
- garden
- vacuum



- Make time to play outside
- Have fun developing skills
- Use your feet to get around
- Get together for a family activity
- Remember to help around the house

Active play, every day is good for everyone's body, brain and mood. For more ideas on ways to play at home, visit [activeforlife.com](http://activeforlife.com)

ACTIVE FOR LIFE®



## Tips for Families:

# Raising Children to Speak More Than One Language

There are many ways to help a child learn more than one language. Always do what's best for your family!

## Tips for Parents

**Make sure kids hear their home language a lot, as early as possible.**

**Why?** A child's brain is ready to learn languages at birth.

**If you speak two languages at home, talk a lot in each language.**

**Why?** It is best for language learning if a child hears both languages at the same time. Parents should try and spend at least 30% of time speaking the second language.

**Make sure kids hear words in real life – don't depend on screens.**

**Why?** The best way for young children to learn a language is by hearing people around them talk to them, and with each other. **Even better:** When parents or caregivers read and tell stories in their home language, children hear more and different types of words.

For more information on early literacy and language development, please visit the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation at [www.childrensliteracy.ca](http://www.childrensliteracy.ca)

## Practical ideas

### One adult, one language:

One adult in the family can speak one language while another adult speaks the other. This way the child hears both languages every day.

**One adult, both languages:** One adult in the family can speak a mix of both languages. **Tip:** It is better to mix languages between sentences (i.e., "Look over there, a dog! Un chien!") instead of within sentences ("Look over there, un chien! A dog!").

**Try both ideas.** Why? There are many ways to help a child learn more than one language. It's okay to use both ideas listed above.

### Join activities where your child can hear their home language outside of the home.

Speak with grandparents or other relatives. Go to local community events (such as free library programs, cultural festivals and so on). Interact with other people who speak the same language (for example, a babysitter who speaks Punjabi; piano lessons from a French teacher; a Mandarin-speaking soccer coach).

**Why?** The more a child hears a language spoken by others, the more it helps them learn.

*Resources from the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation are free and can be downloaded or reprinted*



Canadian  
Children's  
Literacy  
Foundation

Fondation pour  
l'alphabétisation  
des enfants  
canadiens

## Common Questions:

# Raising Children to Speak More Than One Language

## Question

## Answer

Why should my child speak a language other than English or French?

There are many benefits to speaking more than one language! These include cognitive, social-emotional, professional, cultural, and personal benefits.



We don't speak English or French at home. Does this mean my child will have trouble learning English or French at school?

No. What's important is that your child hears lots of words at home, in any language, right from birth. When a child knows their home language well, it helps them understand how and why to communicate and use language. This helps them pick up their school language quite quickly, especially because the child will be around it and have lots of chances to practice at school.



We speak two languages at home. Does this mean my child will know fewer words than other kids when they start school?

No. Children who hear more than one language at home often know just as many words as a child who only hears one language at home. Sometimes they know even more words!

**Here's an example:** Two children are best friends. One comes from a family that speaks English and Farsi. The other comes from a family that speaks English only. When they start school, both children will know almost the same total number of words. The only difference is that one child's words will be in English and Farsi, and the other child's words will all be English. Once they start school, the child who speaks both Farsi and English should be able to catch up in English because they will be around the language more.



If we speak more than one language to our children, will they get confused and have poor language skills?

No. Children who hear more than one language have a lower chance of having a delay in their language skills than children who speak only one language. It's good news!



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# Indigenous Literacy

According to Paulsen (2021), in an article written for the Edmonton Public Library entitled: How to Choose Indigenous Books for Children: Reading books by diverse authors, featuring a variety of races, genders, sexual orientations and physical abilities, is incredibly important for children. Not only because children see themselves represented in the stories they read, but also so they're exposed to people with different backgrounds and living different lives than them. Diverse books also help children understand anti-racism. No matter the time of year, we encourage families to actively seek out books featuring Indigenous characters.

Here are important considerations when choosing material:

- Does my book have an Indigenous Author?
- Does my book have characters from one of the Indigenous groups: First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit? Does my book offer specific information, language and traditions from a variety of Indigenous Nations? The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report recommends children's books be published incorporating English and Indigenous languages within their pages.
- Is my book free from stereotypes?
- Is my book based on historical events and tragedies? It is important to introduce children to these events and the concept of structural racism from an early age. However, we must also make room for books that show people, who just happen to be Indigenous, going on adventures, making friends, in the present day or in the fantasy and sci-fi genres.

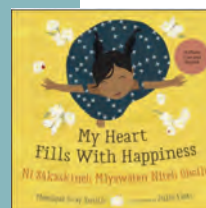
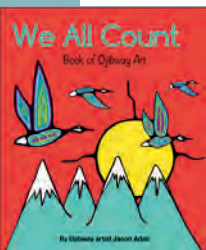
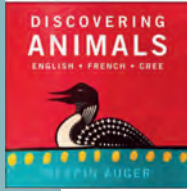
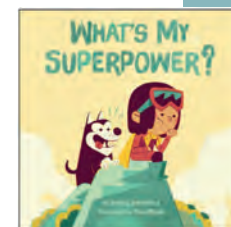
## Resources for Choosing Indigenous Books:

- IBBY Canada - the Canadian National Section of the International Board on Books for Young People [www.ibby-canada.org/indigenous-picture-book-collection/](http://www.ibby-canada.org/indigenous-picture-book-collection/)
- local libraries - look for these symbols which indicate books with Indigenous content:



## Resources for Purchasing Indigenous Books:

- GoodMinds.com [www.goodminds.com](http://www.goodminds.com)
- Medicine Wheel Publishing [www.medicinewheelpublishing.com](http://www.medicinewheelpublishing.com)
- Strong Nations [www.strongnations.com](http://www.strongnations.com)
- Scholastics Canada [www.scholastic.ca](http://www.scholastic.ca)





# Indigenous Numeracy

Numbers in English	Numbers in Anishinaabemowin	Numbers in Mohawk	Numbers in Michif	Numbers in Cree
1. One	Bezhigh	énska	Un	Peyak
2. Two	Niizh	tékeni	Deu	Niso
3. Three	Niswi	áhsen	Trouaw	Nisto
4. Four	Niiwin	kaié:ri	Kat	Newo
5. Five	Naanan	wisk	Sink	Niyanan
6. Six	Ningodwaaswi	ià:ia'k	Sis	Nikotwasik
7. Seven	Niizhwaaswi	tsiá:ta	Set	Tepakohp
8. Eight	Nishwaaswi	sha'té:kon	Wuit	Ayinanew
9. Nine	Zhaangaswi	tióhton	Nef	Kikamitataht
10. Ten	Midaaswi	oié:ri	dzis	Mitataht

Aboriginal Perspectives (2024), Learning Ojibwe. (2024), Metis Nation of Ontario (2024), MohawkLanguage.ca (2024), Ojibwe.net. (2024)

## A recipe for you to try with your family:

### Classic Bannock

Serves: 8

Ingredients:

3 cups flour

2 tablespoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

¼ cups shortening or butter

¾ cup water

Stewart, Getty. (2021)



### Instructions:

1. Mix dry ingredients.
2. Cut shortening or butter into the flour mixture. The fat should be evenly distributed throughout the flour while still being in small lumps.
3. If going camping, stop here! Place the flour mixture into a large plastic bag and label it. You'll mix in the water at your campsite.
4. Gradually add the smallest amount of water and stir until ingredients come together.
5. Knead the dough gently until soft, adding more water if needed. You should be able to handle the dough without it being too sticky.

### Classic Bannock – Resized

Serves: 1

Ingredients:

7 teaspoons flour

½ + ¼ teaspoon baking powder

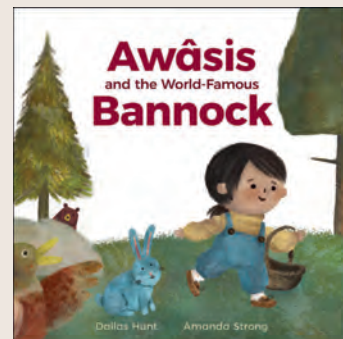
1 pinch salt

1 ½ teaspoons of shortening or butter

1 tablespoon + 1 ½ teaspoon water



### A story about bannock for you and your family:





# Get in the habit of asking questions – reading isn't passive.

When reading aloud, it is not just about the story – it's also about engaging your children's brains. **Always ask questions!**

There are three basic types of questions to help young minds expand and develop:

**1** **Literal Questions** — These are right in front of you to help teach vocabulary and information.

*What color is that? What type of plant is this?*

**2** **Inferential Questions** — Your child will have to follow the information in the book to get the answer. These help children look beyond just the words and to the ideas.

*Does that animal like what it is eating? How did the character feel?*

**3** **Evaluative Questions** — What children think about a book's situation. These are judgment calls and will help your little one take a position on the story. They will benefit your child's development of empathy and perspective; improve their communication skills; and teach them to tell their own stories.

*Did you think that the character was nice? Do you think that was a good thing? What would you do?*

For our earliest readers, it will be hard to get them to understand all the questions. But as they grow, their brains need to be fed – make sure you mix up the questions that you ask when reading aloud so they get it all.

Read Aloud  
**15 MINUTES**  
Every child. Every parent. Every day.

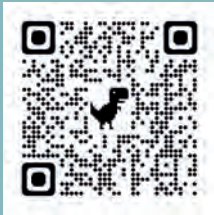
Learn more at [ReadAloud.org](https://www.ReadAloud.org)

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