

# *10 Traditions to Strengthen Literacy and Your Family (at the same time)*



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# *10 Traditions to Strengthen Literacy and the Family* (at the same time)

Dedicated to Annelise, Mackenzie, Thomas, and Addison Day for  
picking me to be your mom so I could think of fun stuff.

# *10 Traditions to Strengthen Literacy and Your Family (at the same time)*

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## Basic List of Literacy Skills

The lists below contain some of the basic indicators and skills to look for in your child as they are growing. These skills can emerge as early as 6 months old and as late as 3 years old, and this is considered normal. When you provide a literacy-rich environment and read to your child 20 minutes per day from books you both love, your child will progress in reading at a pace that is right for him or her. Reading development is similar to how some children walk at 8 months, while others wait until 16 months, yet both are equally capable of becoming skilled athletes. Even children within the same family can display significant differences in literacy behavior. By providing natural materials, such as books, paper, and writing utensils (flashcards and similar materials are not necessary), eliminating or significantly limiting screen time, and regularly talking with your child about the world around you, you set your child up for success as they grow in literacy.

### Early Reading Skills

- Understands that things and people are called by a specific name
- Uses words and gestures to indicate needs
- Listens to another person speak
- Listens to music
- Sings, or mimics singing along
- Wants to touch, hear, and explore books
- Likes a certain part or picture in a book
- Asks to be read to through words or gesture
- Presents to read to self, stuffed animals, or other
- Notices if you skip a page or change the story
- Notices writing utensils and wants to touch or try them

### Emergent Reading Skills

Browses books	Can point to a letter
Knows the print carries meaning	Can point to a word
Reads environmental print, recognizes it as a guidepost (name of a store, direction signs)	Uses crayons, pencils, or other similar objects
Recognizes familiar words, such as own name	Writes with purpose, even if illegible
Can turn a book upside right to begin "reading"	Writing begins to look like letter approximations
Turns pages	Can write letters, especially those from own name
Recognizes previously read books	Pretends to read own writing out loud
Pretends to read to self or other	Points to words as someone is reading
Says the words in the story from memory	Requests books or literacy activities
Talks about the story	Engages in imaginative play
Relates story to own life	Identifies letters
Answers questions about the story	Knows letters represent sounds
Uses language from familiar stories	Can say if words rhyme
Understands that print goes from top to bottom, left to right	Can generate rhyming words
Looks at pictures for meaning	Can generate non-sense words that rhyme
	Can anticipate a rhyme and generate rhyming word that fits

# *1. Creating a family fraternity through language*

Having regular family traditions and language unique to your family, even if they are not written down, is a key part of creating a beautiful family culture. Most people share a common desire to be part of something special, something bigger than they are. There are connections you can create for your family within the outside community, but the first and most important community you can develop is the one within your own family. Tweens and teenagers will start to look for this connection outside of your family if it's not strong. If you have created a rich family culture, you are likely to continue to be your child's strongest compass, even throughout the teenage years.

When my children were very small, people would often remark to their dad and I how "horrible" or "difficult" it was going to be once our children would all become teenagers. Of course, my children have challenged me and done many things that caused stress for me and our family--and they continue to do so! But, we share an incredibly close bond that has allowed us to navigate the teenage years in a loving and supportive way. They do not shut me out because I am a safe place for them to fall, no matter the circumstance. I expect greatness out of them and I let them know this on a regular basis. I help them see their inner gifts and remind them they are enough, so they can play full out in life.

Our family fraternity has been a big part of this. Creating a family fraternity through language and activities is similar to how college fraternities and sororities do this. What's their purpose? Bonding. The purpose is the same for your family. A big part of parenting is teaching kids that they are part of an important family--your family. Important groups share a language, codes, and rituals that identify the group. Your family is no exception! The traditions in this book are a great place to start.

In our family, in addition to all of the activities and traditions we enjoy, we also have a whole host of words and phrases that are unique to us. We have named our home, certain rooms in our home, things we do, and have all kinds of little phrases that people who spend time with us will soon begin to pick up on. We have nicknames for each other. We know what our traditions are and when and how we do them and we actively talk about them.

In addition to bigger traditions, our connection can be as simple as everyone murmuring at the end of dinner, "Many hands make light work" which is our way of getting everyone into gear at clean-up time. Or, it could be me saying, "All for one, one for all," which is my way of indicating that if one of them isn't going to be full of good choices during what we are doing, it will have negative consequences for all of them. This helps them help each other make good choices at times when I really need them to cooperate. It could be me saying, "I don't have time for the ER today!" which I say whenever I want them to pay particular attention to safety. This reminds them that if someone gets hurt during what we are doing, all of the fun is going to stop, so be careful and make good choices.

Another is FHB, which means "Family holds back." This is said by one of us whenever we have guests over sharing a meal, a gentle reminder that we hold back and let guests serve themselves first. This is because there are a lot of us and if we were to dig in first, certain dishes could quickly become scarce! All of these simple things are part of "us."

When you repeat the same phrases, over and over again, year after year, they become part of your family culture. All you have to do to accomplish this, is to think of fun ways to say things, say it in that fun way, remember that you said it, and say it that way again the next time. And the next. This family culture is the glue that will keep your children close to you as they navigate the years that lead to independence.

## 2. Family Photo Phone Directory



After affixing the cover title with a gluestick, clear laminate paper can be used to seal it for cleanliness and longevity.

Let's start with the Family Photo Phone Directory. This is a ton of fun for kids because it helps them feel more connected to family and friends, as well as more grown-up! It also helps your kids connect visually with people they do not see very often.

To make a Family Photo Phone Directory, you just need to buy a traditional phone book at a stationery store, or you can order one online at Amazon.com, or another stationery store you like. It is helpful if there is one tab per letter of the alphabet. This makes it easier for children to use, especially younger children.

It's also handy to buy the kind that has binder rings that open, so you can pages to sections where you need more pages, or where you need to make changes over the years. Unlike a normal phone directory, you may want to update this one even if someone doesn't move or change their number. You'll understand why in a minute.

this size. Print pictures of everyone you want to have in the directory. In this directory, each person can be listed individually, in which case married people will have their information listed twice. I liked doing it this way, because then my children could look up the name by the person's first name. The whole point of this directory is for it to be kid-friendly. Let's take, for example, Aunt Judy and Uncle Michael. Aunt Judy would be listed under J. Uncle Michael would be listed under M. If your child wanted to call Aunt Judy, he would go to J. This way, he doesn't have to know or even think about what her last name is. He gets to connect with his relative based on the name that he calls them--their first name.

Of course, if you have pet names for people instead of using their real names, you can list them in this directory according to those. Or, you could list them according to their real names as an opportunity to teach these to your child. It's completely up to you!

To complete an entry, use a gluestick to affix the small picture of the person on the address book page. Think about where you want to put it. You may end up using two entry spaces per person, depending on the size and spacing of the directory you purchased. Once the person is glued in, write their personal information into the address book.

You can include other fun things your child wants to include about the person, such as their interests, or something they often say. Use your imagination. You will want to keep this directory in the Thank You Box, which is the next activity! This way, your children will have a handy, fun way to get numbers and addresses quickly.

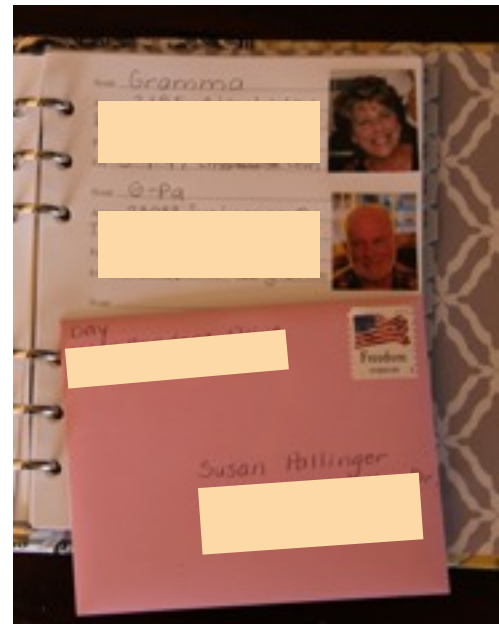


## 2. Family Photo Phone Directory

Supplies: Address book, photos of family members, scissors, gluestick, and pen or pencil.



This is page G, for Gramma, G-Pa, Grandma, Uncle George, and the like. The addresses are blanked out for privacy, but this gives the idea. Using pencil in an address book makes for easy updates when someone moves or changes their phone number.



A thank you note from Mackenzie, ready to go.

### 3. *Thank You Box*

A Thank You Box is a terrific way to get your children in the habit of writing personal thank you notes for gifts and acts of service they receive. If you also want to stay or get in this habit, it can be most helpful for grown-ups, too! Hand-writing thank you notes used to be a common activity for anyone with basic manners. Yet, in the age of email, it's falling by the wayside. I haven't given up on it and simply put, I refuse to! There is nothing quite like getting a personal note in the mail. It's even more special now than it used to be. For this reason, I am still teaching my children and others about the power of this simple act.

To make a Thank You Box, get a 3-drawer organizer like this one. Make sure your address book fits in one of the drawers before you buy it. Use puffy paint or other permanent marker to write Thank You Box on the top. In the top drawer, put your Family Photo Phone Directory.

In the second drawer, put an assortment of thank you notes you think your kids will enjoy. I like to collect them from special places when I travel, but you can always stock-up at from a superstore or Amazon.com when you're just getting started. You can also print a recent wallet-sized photo of your children or family that can be included when thank you notes are written.

In the bottom drawer, put books or a roll of stamps and pens. I like to include colored pencils and markers in case my kids are feeling creative. You can also have fun stickers for your kids to put on the outside of the envelopes to make it extra fun for the receiver when they open their mailbox.



I personally have been so drawn to writing my whole life. I love writing, writing utensils, print written in many styles, the smell of the paper, the sight of opening a mailbox to see something written by hand. I think, wow, in a generation or so, the idea of writing notes may be completely passe! It's part of my mission to make a dent in this. I hope you will help me.

The Thank You Box helps keep this tradition alive, while simultaneously helping children create a grateful spot in their heart about something that has been given to them. It's wonderful to cultivate habits in oneself and one's children to notice the gifts that are received in life, both material and energetic.

Taking a few moments of pause to acknowledge this and to share that acknowledgement in a formal way with the giver is a powerful act. The Thank You Box is one way that helps parents with full lives get this done in a fun and efficient way.



### 3. Thank You Box



Drawer 1: Your Family  
Photo Phone Directory



Drawer 2: Thank you notes and stickers.  
You can also print recent pictures of  
your kids to put in the note, too.



Drawer 3: Pencils, pens, colored  
pencils, markers, stamps.

## 4. Writing and Drawing Center



A Family Writing Center is an important resource to have in a home beginning from when the youngest child is about 3 or 4 years old. When parents ask me, “What should I do to help my child become a good reader?” or “How can I make sure my child does well in school?” the Family Writing Center shows up as one of the top answers. It is one of the most critical things you can do to help set your child up for academic success.

Here’s how to assemble a family writing center. First, purchase some type of organizing system that has at least 3 compartments. A basic one that works well is a 3- or 5- drawer organizer like this one that you can purchase from any major superstore or at Amazon.com. In the top drawer, you can put all types of paper, including lined, blank white, and blank colored papers. You can also get decorative papers you think your child will like, like these.

In the second drawer, put envelopes of various sizes, index cards, sticky notes, notecards, stickers, and other things that are fun to use in writing.

In the third drawer, put pencils, pens, crayons, markers, scotch tape, a hole-puncher, a stapler, and age-appropriate scissors. For older children, you can include white-out, and other more “grown-up” items, once they have reached a level of maturity that shows they can handle using these.

If you get a 5-drawer organizer, you can use one drawer for writing utensils only, and another drawer for the other office supply-type items. Use the last drawer for “books” you have made out of paper for your child to use. To learn how to make simple books out of paper for your child’s writing center, view the video: [How to Make Simple Books at Daychild.org](http://HowtoMakeSimpleBooks.atDaychild.org).

The Family Writing Center should be kept in a special place. You may want to make it inaccessible for younger children. It really depends on your child, where your children play, how many children you have, how old they are, and other considerations. Make it work for you.

When you introduce the Family Writing Center, you will want to let your children know that you expect it to stay clean and organized. Let your children know that if they do not care for the Writing Center, you will “close” it for a while. If you are regularly replenishing your writing center, making paper books for and with your children, and using it as an active part of your family life, they will not want their writing center to be closed.

Having a writing center in the home dramatically increases the level of attention put onto not just letters and writing, but also to reading and spelling. Parents do not need to go to teacher supply stores to buy flashcards or other fancy learning games for their children. Research shows that high literacy families actually do not do this. Rather, they have lots of natural writing materials and literacy opportunities for their children.

The family writing center provides a way of organizing these materials for greater accessibility and care of the items. Having this center in your home also sends a powerful message to children. The message is, “This is important.” Unfortunately, often times screens now dominate the most important rooms in the home, as well as much of the family member’s time. Families speak an average of 2,000 words less per hour when a television is on. Even less when engaged with personal screens. The family writing center is a great way to engage with children, encouraging both them and you to keep the technological devices on the sidelines.

## 4. Writing and Drawing Center

Here are suggested items for each drawer of a 5-drawer writing center.



A 3- or 5-drawer organizer works well. This one has sections on the top, most don't. You can make a custom sign for your center and affix it with clear laminate.



Drawer 1: Blank white and colored paper, lined paper, simple books made out of paper, construction paper, and decorative scrapbooking paper



Drawer 2: Envelopes, stickers, cards, mini-notebooks, sticky notes, index cards, and any other miscellaneous paper supplies.



Drawer 3: Pencils, pens, markers, colored pencils, paper clips, gluesticks, tape, highlighter, glue, mini-stapler, white out (depending on your children's ages), and safety scissors. Anything else you think your child will enjoy from the office section.

## 5. Journals and Daily Family Calendars

Writing has played a central role in my life since I was about ten years old. It came about as a coping strategy, and has turned out to be a significant gift for myself as an adult, and for my family. I've been able to weave writing throughout my children's lives as well. My strategies and ideas often have some element of writing to them, and building literacy while bonding your family is no exception.

Writing on a pregnancy calendar during the pregnancy is a great way to start the literacy traditions in your family, whether you start with the first baby or not. I kept these calendars for each of my children, writing a little tidbit each day. You can write pregnancy milestones, ups and downs, the baby's heart rate, and all the usual things you might think of recording.

It's also fun to write things your other children say about the baby. I remember when Mackenzie would put a pillow or ball under her shirt and say, "I'm havin' a baby. Hins name is Tom-is. Is a boy baby." These are the types of things you might think you'll never forget, but you do.

Each year find a new calendar. You can be a major over-achiever and do one for each individual child, or create one family calendar that includes everyone. By writing these tidbits on a calendar, and spelling them phonetically to reflect how your child speaks, you can chronicle the subtleties of every day life and the language development of your children.

Now that my kids are big, we pull out the big basket of calendars and go through them together. We literally belly laugh until we have tears streaming from our eyes at the ridiculous, loving, and insightful things they said over the years—things they said to me, to each other, about their view of the world. It only took a minute or so a day to fill a 2-inch box and now it adds a big dose of love and fun to our family time, whenever we want it to.





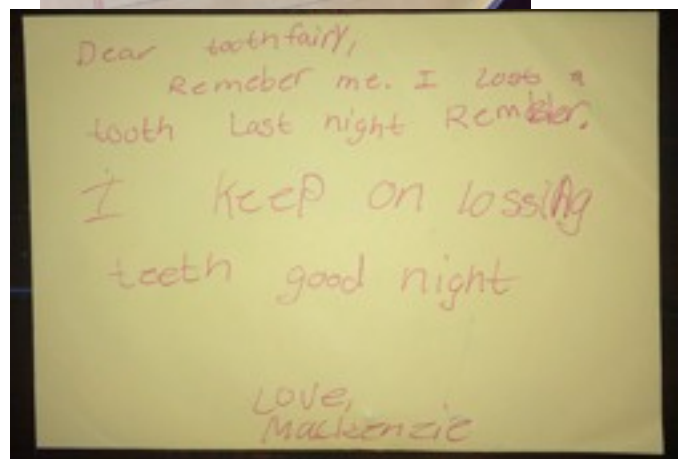
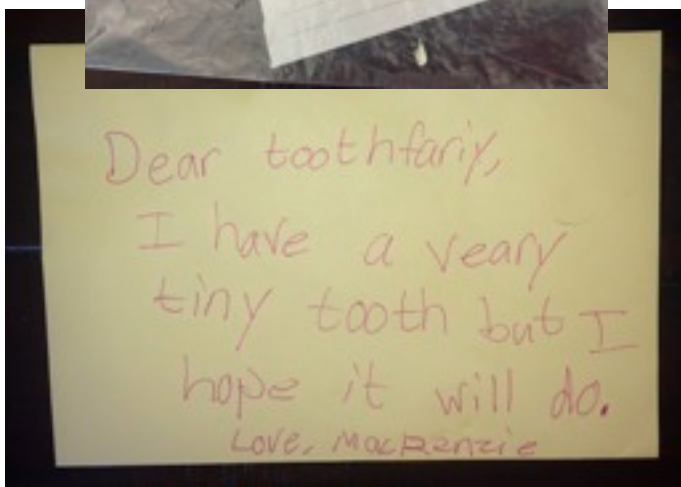
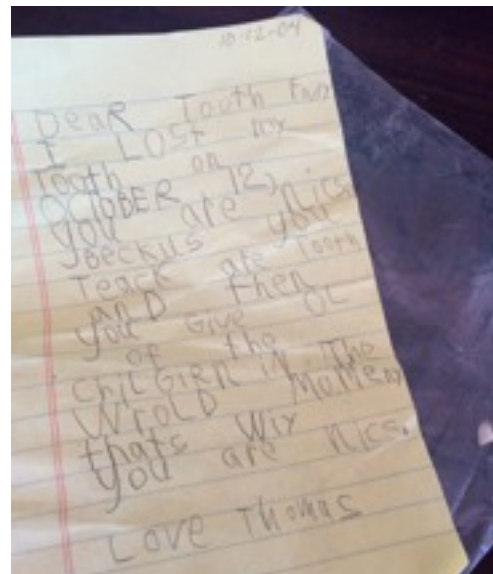
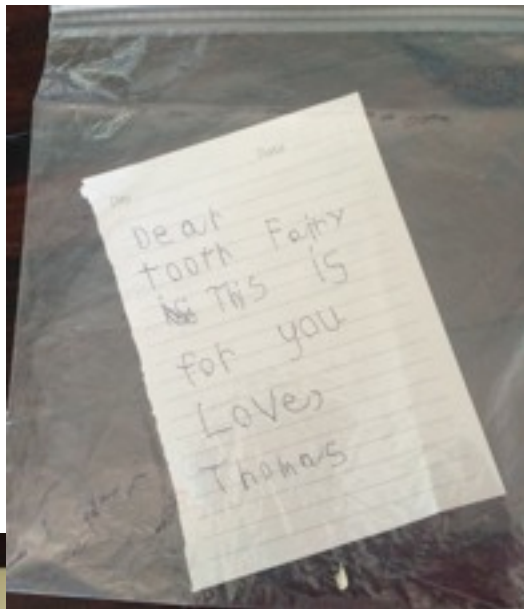
## 6. Tooth Fairy Letters

When my first child lost her first tooth, I wanted to find a way to use this little milestone as another way to chronicle her life and also help her growth an author. I also am not fond of looking at human teeth outside of the human body, so wanted to find a way to keep the tooth without having to look at it again.

I decided to have my kids write a letter to the tooth fairy on the outside of an envelope, put the tooth in, and seal it. This envelope became what was put under the pillow for the “Tooth Fairy” to take so she could leave behind her small treasure for my child. For us, this was \$1 cash. When my child would lose a tooth, I would help him draft his tooth fairy letter. The letters went something like this:

"Dear Tooth Fairy, How are you? I hope you have been collecting lots of teeth for your tooth castle. I lost this tooth yesterday while I was at school. As you can see, I have been brushing my teeth really well. I hope that you will leave me a treat. I hope you like my tooth! Love, Annelise."

Or, something along those lines. I love this tradition because it creates a permanent record of your child's handwriting and storytelling growth during this critical developmental phase, which typically lasts from age 6 - 10. You end up with envelopes filled with teeth, that have your child's writing on the outside. And, you never have to look at the tooth again! It's a hygienic way to store lots of teeth. It's super oober fun to look back and reread the envelopes with your child. My kids crack up at what they wrote and it's always a sentimental moment for me.



## 7. Photo Storybooks



Making simple books for your children is a wonderful way to bond them while you naturally teach your children to how to read. I started making books for my first daughter when she was about 11 months old. Her first book was filled with pictures of her doing simple things. Each page had only one word, ending in "ing." So, it was "playing", "sleeping", "eating", "loving", etc.

At that time, I affixed pictures with a gluestick to construction paper, laminated the pages at a teacher store, and then had the books comb-bound at a copy store. Later, the comb binding switched

to spiral binding. These books are still a cherished part of our family, even though the kids are big. They enjoy looking at them and surely if they become parents, their children will enjoy seeing them, too.

But the real gift was what they did for my children while they were growing. Not only did the books help my children begin reading before they started kindergarten, it helped them build a strong sense of self, and a love for their family and siblings.



Today, these books are kept in a basket in our living room. Inevitably, someone will pull them out and we all want to see.

Laminated books serve a different purpose than the photo albums you can make on your own, or online at Shutterfly or a similar site, in that these books are made for your child to touch and use. If you write them with simple sentences, they become part of creating a literacy-rich environment, in addition to the celebration effect for each child. I make them in the same way for my niece and nephew now, chronicling our fun together and letting them see how special they are to me and my children. Can't wait to make them for my grandchildren. (Well, I can and hopefully WILL wait since all four of my children are teenagers right now!)



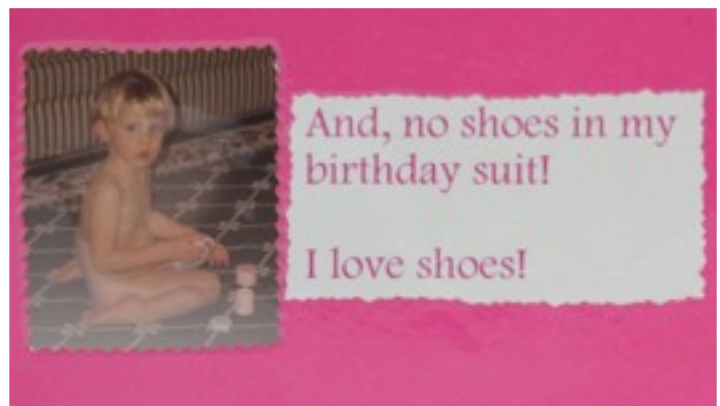
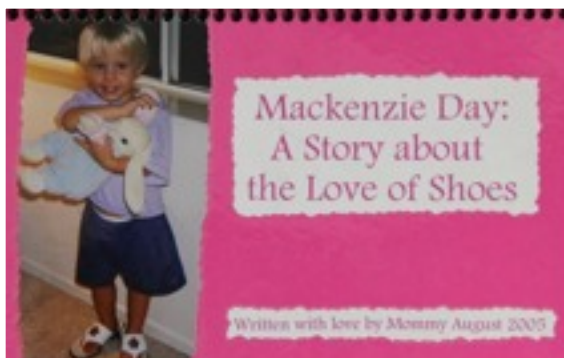
This is Mackenzie's "Hello, Baby" book. I wrote one of these for each of my children before their first birthday. Each simple page has an "ing" word.



# Photo Storybooks



These are from Mackenzie's shoe book. She loved taking her shoes on and off and was always drawn to different types of shoes, unlike me and her sister who have little interest in shoes! She had red cowboy boots, shoes for make-believe, and was always taking other people's shoes when they slipped them off!



# Photo Storybooks



Books about siblings are powerful in happy moments and are great to pull out in unhappy moments, too.



This book is about Thomas' doctor appointment to have his kindergarten shots and physical. It chronicles the doctor visit and his emotions as he gets ready for the big boy experience of starting kindergarten.

## 8. *Personalized songs, nursery rhymes, singable books, lullabies, and the Sounds Like Fun CD*

Another fun thing to do that builds phonemic awareness, which is part of the reading readiness foundation, in addition to bonding your children, is to sing songs to them nightly. I used to spend 10 or 15 minutes singing to each of my children while putting them to bed at night and touching their face and hair. (Now, they tuck me in, hehe.)

It's important to teach the traditional nursery rhymes, which are a wonderful, natural way to build phonemic awareness. Simply put, phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate rhyme. Phonemic awareness is one of three elements of the reading-readiness foundation. This skill is one key to reading success and is best built from birth through song and rhyme, rather than trying to remediate it before a child enters school.

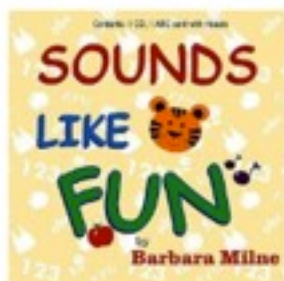
Because nursery rhymes are largely nonsensical ("Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall..."), they lead children to naturally focus on rhyme in addition to meaning. Dr. Seuss knew this, too, even though he may not yet have known the term "phonemic awareness" to describe the essential skill his books help build in young readers.

Some books are easy to turn into simple songs, such as Time for Bed by Mem Fox, and I Love You As Much by Laura Melmed. With each of these books, you can insert your child's name on the last page. Or, insert a collective word for all of your children, such as "love buckets" or "boomchkins."

Raffi and many other artists have wonderful songs for children. You may not have a great singing voice, but your children will absolutely love this special time. You can also write an individual lullaby for each of your children if that sounds fun to you. Even if it's just a morph of another lullaby, children love hearing their own names and qualities sung in songs by their parents.

One of the best resources for building literacy skills in young children is the Sounds Like Fun cd by Barbara Milne. You can get it on Amazon here: <http://www.amazon.com/Sounds-Like-Fun-Barbara-Milne/dp/B0040Q0UA0> . Her constant, even-toned voice and doubling of phrases are critical elements that help children impress her words and teachings. The CD covers a range of early skills, from counting to 30, to the days of the week, to basic manners.

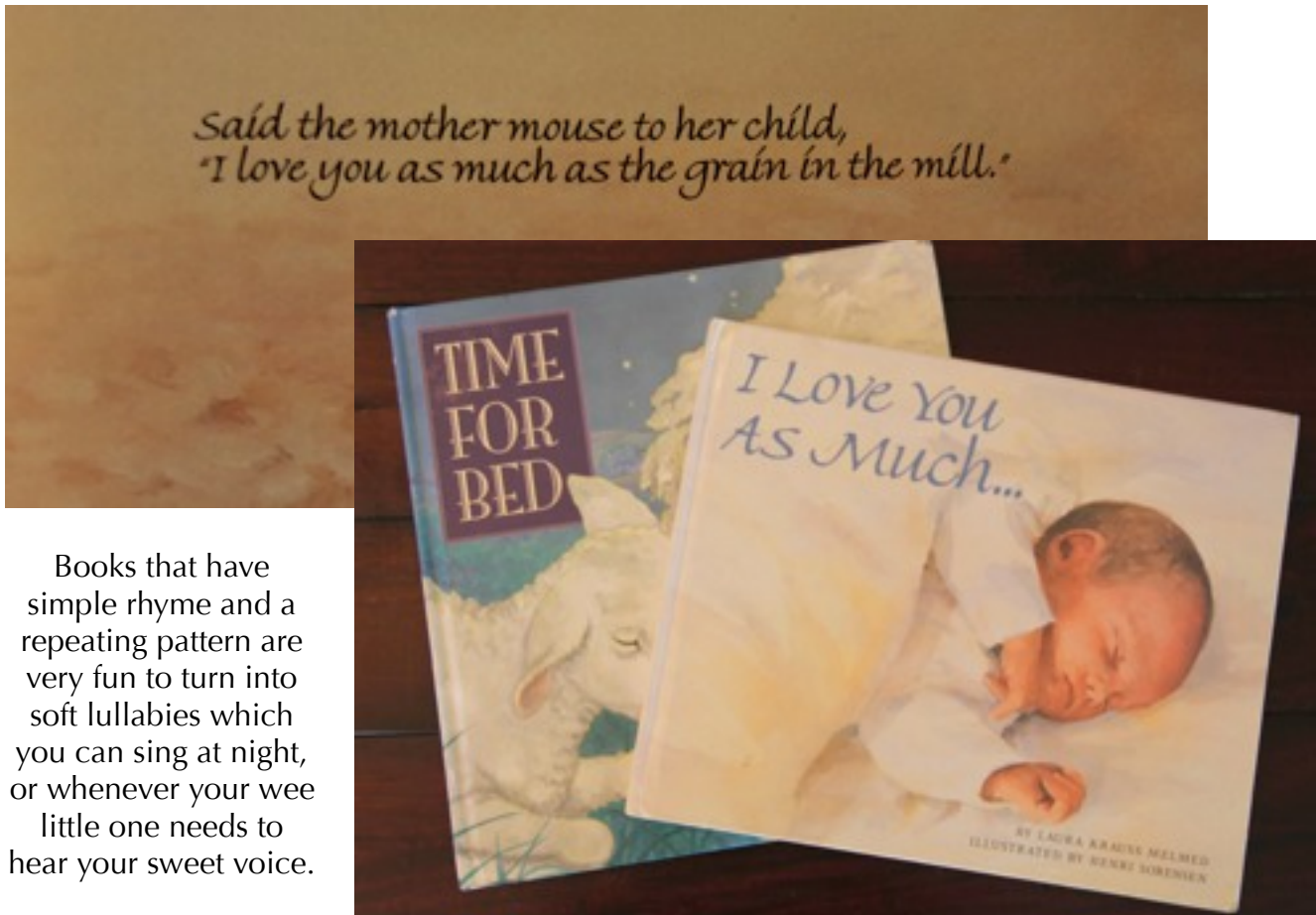
One of the most important songs on the CD is The Letter Sounds. She makes each sound properly (not all sound songs do this) and the CD has a great chart your child can point to while singing the song. This helps your child learn all of their sounds and letters in an efficient and correct way. Children should be able to identify 20 or so of the letters and sounds in our alphabet before they begin reading instruction. This is called "sound/symbol recognition" and it is part of the reading-readiness foundation. Barbara's CD is a gem for children beginning around age 2.



**Sounds Like Fun by Barbara Milne** Aug 17, 2010  
by Barbara Milne  
MP3 Music  
**\$8.99**  
Download or play now in Cloud Player.



## 8. Personalized songs, nursery rhymes, singable books, lullabies, and the Sounds Like Fun CD



Books that have simple rhyme and a repeating pattern are very fun to turn into soft lullabies which you can sing at night, or whenever your wee little one needs to hear your sweet voice.



**Singable Songs for the Very Young: Great with a Peanut-Butter Sandwich** Oct 15, 1996

by Raffi

Audio CD

**\$11.99** Prime

Get it by **Thursday, Jan 29**

More Buying Choices

**\$3.97** used & new (100 offers)

MP3 Music

**\$9.49**

Download or play now in Cloud Player.

Other Formats: Vinyl, Audio Cassette

★★★★★ = 165

Autolip >> eligible and 1 more promotion \*

CDs & Vinyl: See all 10 items



**Raffi The Singable Songs Collection (20th Anniversary Special Edition)** Oct 15, 1996 | Box set

by Raffi

Audio CD

**\$22.59** Prime

Get it by **Thursday, Jan 29**

More Buying Choices

**\$15.10** used & new (57 offers)

MP3 Music

**\$18.98**

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★★★★★ = 269

Product Description

... record called Singable Songs for the Very Young . The artist

was a ...

CDs & Vinyl: See all 10 items

## 9. Make-It Plates



Making plates to mark special occasions or holidays within your family is a fun tradition to share over as often as you like while your children are growing. I used the Make A Plate Kit at [www.Makit.com](http://www.Makit.com). With Make-A-Plate, you design the plates on special paper at home and then send the papers to Makit. A couple weeks later, they send back your beautiful plates!

These plastic plates are super fun to make with young children and teenagers. Everyone loves to get creative and the sky is the limit. Children can include quotes, stories, drawings, poems, anything!

The directions say to use only the markers provided in the kit (of which you only get a few colors), but you can actually use any type of marker or colored pencil and they still turn out great. Just avoid crayons because they are waxy and messy on these.

We have made the plates over the years to welcome new seasons, holidays, birthdays, to make a plate for Santa's cookies and another for reindeer treats, to honor the life of someone or an animal that we have loved who passed, and more.

Be sure to have your young artists sign their plate, creating a record of their signatures, and date them. They are lightweight and easy to wash, great for everyday use with kids and a nice, special step above a paper plate.



## 10. Custom Family Calendar

For many years. I made a family calendar each month because there simply was not one available on the market that had big enough boxes for real family life. The calendar has a column for each person, and a couple of extra columns to write your planned meals, relatives' birthdays, and other household information you want to keep track of, such as trash day, housekeeping day, etc. I made it out of lined cardstock from a teacher store each month. It measured about 30" X 36". The calendar shows up in this sibling bonding book because it can be used as yet another way for family members to share the love.

After a date has passed, that box becomes "free" for someone to write a compliment to another family member in it. To start this tradition, get the calendar and fill it out with everyone's appointments, events, and similar time-certain activities (a time-certain activity is an activity where you or your child must be somewhere at a certain time). Add "all family" events by writing the event bigger, going across all of your boxes for that day, such as "Day at the Lake" or whatever you have planned. Make it special.

Embellish the box for each of your birthdays when those come up. You can also decorate the calendar with stickers. Children can decorate around the top and the bottom of the calendar if you'd like, but I didn't usually let them write on the calendar because it can get out of hand if you have a lot of children.

Post the calendar in GCS (Grand Central Station: this is typically the kitchen of a house, but may be a different area for you). It can go on the fridge, on a pantry door, an open wall space, anywhere that is easy for everyone to see and accessible. If you hang it where it is not easily seen, you may not use it as much and children will rarely end up looking at it because they will not seek it out the way you would.

After a few days of the month have passed, start writing compliments to your family members in the past boxes. You can write simple things you notice about them. "You make my heart go pitter-pat!" You can write habits you are wanting them to develop. "You cleaned up your room before school today!" or something you want to say to them for the day, "Make today great! I can't wait to play Apples to Apples with you tonight!"

Quietly encourage your children to write in each other's boxes as well. This is an activity that will take on a life of its own once you get started. If family members stop writing compliments when life gets full, simple modeling and reminders usually do the trick.



MONTH AND YEAR					
DATE	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME	OTHER
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