

Literacy Activities for Babies



Reading is not a set of isolated skills that children learn when they go to school. Learning to read is a fluid process that begins at birth. At birth, an **infant's brain** is still developing and the experiences that we provide determine how the brain is developed. Literacy activities for infants involve more than just reading. Almost every activity that you do with infants can be considered a literacy activity. Each new activity and experience encourages brain connections that children will potentially use throughout their lifetime.

These activities work for parents, grandparents, family childcare providers, infant room teachers, and anyone who cares for a little one!

1. **Talk.** Talking to babies is imperative to language development. Describe the world around them. Talk about what is happening.
2. **Sing and dance.** Babies learn phonological awareness through music.
3. **Read.** No explanation needed here, right?
4. **Be consistent and predictable.** Babies thrive on routine. Knowing what will happen next helps their emotional, social, and cognitive development.
5. **Recite nursery rhymes.** Children naturally respond to rhythm and rhymes.

6. **Respond to baby's cries.** Babies develop a close bond with those who quickly respond to their needs and distress calls. Bonding makes babies feel safe and this type of relationship fosters positive brain development. Don't believe that old wives tale that responding to baby's cries will create a "spoiled" baby. Crying is the only way a baby has to communicate. Imagine if someone ignored your words, your needs, and your desires in an attempt to "teach you a lesson." What would you really learn except not to depend on that person anymore - you would come to rely on person who actually responds to your needs, right?
7. **Listen to different types of music.** There is a clear **link between music and literacy** development.
8. **Realize that it's OK to have quiet time!** While it is important to provide stimulation for a baby's developing brain, it is also important to have some calming time. Imagine if you were "stimulated" all day long! Quiet time may consist of rocking a baby and listening to soft music before nap time. Babies need time to think too!
9. **Participate in call and response activities.** When babies coo and babble, adults should pause (waiting until the baby is "done" in the same manner you would wait for someone to finish a sentence) and then respond with a comment or sentence of your own. This helps babies understand the pattern of a conversation.
10. **Give babies rattles and mobiles.** Infants are beginning to develop eye-tracking skills. Giving them rattles or mobiles to track encourages eye movement which will help them learn to follow words and pictures in a book.
11. **Play peek-a-boo.** Action and reaction games are an important part of cognitive development.
12. **Blow bubbles.** Sit Baby on your lap and blow bubbles for him/her to watch and track - this increases their ability to track objects. Older infants or toddlers can try to blow bubbles on their own. There is some **research** that says toddlers, who blow bubbles, speak earlier. Perhaps it is because of the muscle movements in their mouths. Or perhaps it is because toddlers with bubbles are more likely to be with an engaging adult. Either way, blowing bubbles is a simple way to increase pre-literacy and literacy skills (and it's fun and easy too!). Click **here** for easy bubble recipes!

13. **Play with empty boxes.** Empty boxes encourage creativity and thinking skills. Mobile infants can crawl through large boxes or stack smaller ones.
14. **Build with blocks.** Babies learn about spatial relationships and problem solving when they play with blocks. These skills are directly related to reading and comprehension.
15. **Expose Baby to various textures.** Sensory activities are shown to have a positive impact on brain development. You can visit your local fabric store and find squares of faux fur, corduroy, velvet, or satin. You can also put Contact Paper on the floor (sticky side up) for an interesting sensory experience!
16. **Eat Cheerios!** Encouraging children to pick up their cheerios gives them practice with fine motor skills, and eye-hand coordination. Who knew that eating Cheerios could be a literacy activity?! These skills will come in handy when children begin to learn to hold a pencil!
17. **Play instruments.** Children quickly learn to listen to, recognize, and attempt to imitate rhythms and patterns. Listening to and imitating patterns helps children develop phonological awareness.
18. **Act out finger-plays.** There are many finger-play resources on the web such as [Preschool Rainbow](#), Dr. Jean and others on [You Tube](#), and [Songs for Teaching](#).
19. **Go for a walk.** Look at the world around you! Name objects in the environment. Remember that for an infant, almost everything is exciting and new!
20. **Sing action songs and rhymes** like Row Row Row Your Boat, Pat-a-cake, Itsy Bitsy Spider, and If You're Happy and You Know It. Babies will learn that words have meaning!
21. **Make funny faces.** This helps children learn to read facial expressions. Place baby on your lap in front of a mirror and make silly faces. If you have a child-safe mirror, place it on the floor and allow mobile babies to crawl across it. Learning to distinguish differences is a literacy activity!
22. **Name body parts.** This is easy to do during bath time or diaper change time.
23. **Practice "Please" and "Thank-You."** Practice give and take activities. Hold you hand out and say, "please" when Baby has a toy in his/her hand. When he/she gives it to you, say "Thank You." Give

it back and repeat if baby seems interested. Call and response activities help baby brain development.

24. **Learn sign language.** Teaching babies some simple signs like "more" and "milk" will help them communicate with you even before they are able to verbalize the words!
25. **Talk on the telephone.** Provide babies with toy telephones and encourage them to engage in conversation.
26. **Have fun with hats.** Babies quickly learn to pair things up - they learn to make sense of the world by experimenting. Hats go on our heads and shoes go on our feet. Give baby a box with various hats. Putting hats on and taking them off also allows baby to practice motor coordination and self-help skills while thinking and making decisions. Make **paper hats** and read **What's On My Head?**
27. **Play with water.** Water is soothing and a great sensory experience for children. Babies need sensory experiences - these type of activities promote brain development.
28. **Put on (and take off) shoes and socks.** Older infants and toddlers love to take their shoes and socks on/off. Babies can learn concepts like on/off, in/out.
29. **Take a bath.** Bath time is full of learning fun! There are animal shaped-sponges to squeeze, bath time books to read, and discussions to have. Toys that sink and float also provide cognitive experiences.
30. **Visit the library.** In addition to getting new books, many libraries have activities for infants and toddlers.
31. **Fingerpaint.** Exposing older infants to textures and colors increases brain activity! Try a **cornstarch fingerpaint recipe** that you can make at home.
32. **Make a family photo album.** Place photos into a small album. Infants will enjoy seeing and learning to name/identify mommy, daddy, big brother/sister, grandparents, and the family pet!
33. **Make a picture key ring.** Cut pictures out of a magazine (or the Sunday sale paper - the coupon section is normally filled with large color pictures), glue them onto index cards and attach them to with a loose leaf ring (for safety, use this picture ring with adult supervision). Flip through the pictures with baby.

34. **Find books to sing.** Books like *Wheels on the Bus* (Raffi Songs to Read) and *If You're Happy and You Know It* (Baby Board Books) are great ways to combine reading and music.
35. **Tell stories without a book.** The good thing about made-up stories is that you can make them up as you go along. Babies usually find the voice of a caregiver calming and soothing. Older infants and toddlers will be able to recognize some of the words in your story and develop their own images in their mind!
36. **Read wordless books.**
37. **Make up songs with your baby's name in them.** For example, sing, "This is the way we change Ming's diaper...so early in the morning."
38. **Smile and make eye contact!** It sounds simple, but sometimes we forget the importance of smiling. Research shows that babies respond to facial expressions! Babies also bond and connect with friendly faces.
39. **Tell your baby what you are doing before you do it.** "I'm going to change your diaper now." Soon, your baby will know what you mean, and be able to respond, when you say those words!
40. **Unwrap "presents."** Wrap toys in paper (newspaper or simple gift-wrap from the local dollar store will work) and let your infant tear off the paper. This activity will help babies develop object permanence (knowing that an object is there even though he/she can't see it). But it will also help them develop fine motor skills which they will one day use to write their name!
41. **Find action/reaction toys.** These type of toys require babies to do something (push a button or turn a knob) in order to make something happen. Reaction toys, like a jack in the box, encourage babies to anticipate responses. They also learn that they have the power to make something happen. Learning about cause and effect is a literacy activity that every baby can explore.
42. **Play with fabric scraps or scarves** (with supervision of course). Children love to look at colors, shapes, and patterns.
43. **Dump and fill.** Give baby a large bin or basket for their toys. Encourage them to fill the bin and dump it. They probably won't need much "encouragement" since babies do this naturally! Babies will learn concepts such as in/out, up/down, clean/messy... The key is having an adult close by to help introduce and reinforce these concepts.

44. **Have fun with flashlights.** Using flashlights with older babies and toddlers is a fun sensory activity. Sensory activities build cognitive skills. In addition, babies will learn to visually track the light. Visual tracking is a skill children will use when they have to follow words on a page!
45. **Put on a puppet show.** Puppets provide another fun and interesting way to engage in vocabulary building and language experiences!
46. **Visit the zoo.** Babies need exposure to new environments. Visiting the zoo is a good time to expose Baby to new vocabulary.
47. **Rotate toys.** When babies stop showing interest in toys, put them away and bring a few new toys out. Keep babies interest peeked!
48. **Doodle and scribble.** When Baby is old enough to sit in a chair (either on your lap or in a high-chair) and hold a crayon, give him or her paper and large crayons. Encourage baby to scribble and color. Large blank paper works well because young children are more likely to make large motions when coloring. Mobile infants are also able to hold a fat paint brush. Give them a brush, paper and a small cup of water. They will be excited about the process and not care so much that it's just water! You can also use water colors. Exposing children to art activities encourages fine-motor development, eye-hand coordination, imagination, creativity, and cognitive development!
49. **Don't underestimate the power of touch.** Touch is a necessary part of bonding with a baby. Some research shows that touch promotes brain development, physical growth, and emotional development. Cuddle with your baby.
50. **Play ball.** Studies show that children's coordination skills are correlated to future success on intelligence tests. Playing ball and other physical activities improve motor coordination.