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K-1 The Joy of Language

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Introduction

by

Learning to read should be first and foremost a delightful, enjoyable process with the rhythms and rhymes of language ringing in children's ears. There is nothing more rewarding after an early literacy lesson than when young children chime in chorus, "Let's read it again!" As a former first grade teacher and professional writer for children for more than twenty years, I developed (along with my friend and fellow musician and writer, David Plummer) the Joy of Language Early Fluency Big Book Sets. These sets were created for children to have meaningful language experiences and in turn develop a love of reading as they form important literacy and fluency skills.

My passion for language began at an early age. As one of five children, my mother transported us to the library regularly creating an eagerness to unlock print. A Sunday evening ritual took us to my Grandma Rose's house where week after week, she would joyfully exclaim, "Turn off the T.V. kids and I'll read to you." Through countless hours of being read aloud to on my grandmother's lap while I followed along in rapture of a story, laughing, learning, and memorizing language-rich stories, I developed a profound joy of language that facilitated the natural learning of the reading process. This warm, enjoyable lap-top reading experience sent me off to school a "reader" with an endowment of language instilled in me.

Some children are as fortunate as I and come to school with a background of many and varied language experiences—some even like myself are already readers. Many have been exposed to books at home and are on the verge of reading. Others, however, are not so fortunate. Their exposure to books and other forms of rich print are limited. The Joy of Language Early Fluency Big Book Sets are specifically designed to model fluency for all children Pre-K to Second Grade. But they are particularly appropriate for those who come to school without the wonderful, joyful experience of repeated immersion in memorable literature.

"To make words sing is a magical thing,
because in a song words last so long."
Langston Hughes

The Joy of Language Early Fluency Big Book Sets build on this resonance. Melody and song carry words along—creating a river of language for young children—both emergent and struggling readers. The repetition, the melodies, the cadence, and phrases of song help children intuitively and effortlessly absorb language patterns—and the stage is set for them to become successful readers. When children absorb language naturally, they begin to experience reading with fluency and elegance, rather than struggle to unlock arid language word by word—in a "disfluent," disconnected, staccato "reading" exercise. We believe, and research supports, that fluency is a developmental process that begins early and should be taught at every stage of reading development. Contrary to past beliefs, the goal of fluency is not just to be a faster, accurate reader, but to also read with understanding and comprehension along with proper pitch and pause, sensitized to the "voice of the text." Experience with rich, meaningful narration and exposure and instruction in vocabulary, is key to fluency development—at every instructional level.

As children's eyes see and focus on what their ears hear, they begin to imprint the predictable patterns of books, and beginning reading becomes a task that children can accomplish with confidence and joy.

The Joy of Language Early Fluency Big Book Sets contain memorable language that children love to hear again and again. With repeated oral exposure they begin to memorize these patterns of written language and repeat them while reading and singing along. They become more accurate and fluent with each reading!

Research also indicates that when children sing along with (or are read) a language-rich story, they can handle difficult material. Their ability to decipher sophisticated vocabulary is increased, which is enormously important to reading development. Reading aloud—to and with—and choral reading and singing improves children's comprehension and vocabulary.

Why Music? Practically every day, science provides us with visible evidence of the fact that music literally changes children's brains. New brain imaging technologies, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and the positron emission tomography (PET scan) have given neuroscientists a far more accurate view of the working brain than was previously possible. Music lights up the brain, left and right hemispheres prompting neuron junctions, synapses by the billions!

Music facilitates these neural highways, increasing the number of neural connections, allowing for greater retention, memory, and improved focus. It has undeniable power to improve listeners' concentration and speech and language abilities. As Don Campbell states in *The Mozart Effect for Children,* "Music's tendency is to advance the jump in reading and language skills among children...." The Joy of

Language Big Books are based on this research—that music builds and develops on this incredible capacity of music to support language and reading skills.

The Five Essential Compounds of Literacy Instruction The Reading First and Early Reading First initiatives (which are part of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001) mandate that reading programs be scientifically based in reading research so that all children have the opportunity to learn to read competently, with fluency and comprehension, by the end of the third grade.

The Joy of Language Early Fluency Big Book Sets provide opportunities for explicit and systematic teaching, purposeful practice and reinforcement in the five essential components of reading instruction as outlined by the National Reading Panel (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). We would add motivation, a desire to read, to this all-important list. Motivation is often the key that opens the door to reading and facilitates mastery of these other areas. These series of Big Books put a particular emphasis on phonemic awareness, vocabulary development and fluency. Yet, we realize all of these elements must work together in the process of developing confident readers, and provide suggestions for improving phonics and comprehension with the program as well.

What's Included

Big Book *Shared Reading* is one of the most efficient and successful ways to engage children and teach skills in the context of meaningful literature. All eyes focus on a common text, usually enlarged in a big book format so that all children can see the print and pictures and then talk about them easily. The model of shared reading comes to us from Don Holdaway's work with primary children in New Zealand and later in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I had the wonderful opportunity to work with Dr. Holdaway and witness his demonstrations with children firsthand. Holdaway observed that successful early readers had consistently been read to at home by a caring adult, that they had spent time by themselves practicing reading, and that they had opportunities to perform as readers, mimicking, approximating, the modeled practice. *Shared Reading* with a big book is a way to recreate my "grandmother's lap" inside the classroom.

Six Small Books To be set out in a learning center for individual reinforcement and exploration. Opportunities to "try it on their own" increase the comfort and confidence levels of young children providing an opportunity to "learn to read" with focused repetition and rereading.

Read-Along/Sing-Along Cassette Tape and CD Provides a narration with page turns and a sing-along of the story. Children have the opportunity to follow along with the text, while simultaneously listening to a fluent oral rendition or singing of the story. The Joy of Language Early Fluency Big Book CDs and tapes with read-along narration and music sing-along build on the incredible capacity of music to support language and reading skills development. Music reinforces the language by carrying words on a river of song—thus developing a feel for the language.

Teacher's Guide with Activities Provides activities that focus on each of the five essential components of literacy instruction:

✓ *Phonemic Awareness*—The ability to hear, identify, and play with individual sounds or phonemes—tuning the ear to rhyme, rhythm, and the flow of language.

✓ *Phonics*—Word analysis or decoding skills—most efficiently taught systematically and explicitly. In the Joy of Language Early Fluency Big Book Sets, emphasis is on phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, comprehension and fluency—with some suggestions on how the material can be used to reinforce systematic phonics instruction.

✓ *Fluency*—Researchers are discovering that sensitizing children to the natural breaks, phrases or clusters in language—musical phrase boundaries—is key to becoming a fluent reader (Rasinski, 2003, *The Fluent Reader*). Rasinski writes "[Choral singing] is an excellent way to introduce beginning readers to written text because once students have memorized the lyrics (words), [they] can read them as a text, separate from the melody." As in other forms of supported reading, children benefit by reading or following text along while simultaneously listening to a fluent oral rendition. Research on using recorded materials has shown dramatic results. As stated earlier, fluency is not an end result. It begins early and develops throughout a child's exposure to the printed word.

✓ *Vocabulary*—Research has recently revealed that vocabulary is critically important to children's reading development. Fortunately, we *can* put measures in place to significantly improve young children's vocabulary—and thus also improve children's future reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Children are never too young to learn new words—and an appropriate vehicle for learning new vocabulary is books that are read to them—both fiction and non-fiction. When we engage young children in shared reading experiences with appropriate big

books, we have the wonderful opportunity to, at the same time, improve their vocabularies. Children from literacy-poor homes arrive at school with far smaller vocabularies—800 to 1,000 words versus 6,000 to 10,000 words for children from homes rich in literacy experience (Education Week, December, 2001). If children with vocabulary deficiencies don't make up their language deficits in the classroom, what chance do these children have to ever catch up? Many at-risk children need this exposure to rich and varied vocabulary, patterned poetry, rhythm and rhyme, to master language and vocabulary. The Joy of Language Big Books promote this all-important vocabulary and language development.

✓ *Comprehension*—Reading and talking about stories are significantly important elements of emergent literacy—especially in context of children's personal experiences or background knowledge. Comprehension strategies such as using prior knowledge, asking questions to clarify their reading, creating visual images, retelling stories or synthesizing information are all identified and taught where appropriate.

Activities

Here are a few activity models to show how each Early Fluency Book Set can be used to promote the five components of literacy instruction (plus motivation).

Phonemic Awareness: Rhyming Words

After reading *Grandmother's Garden* aloud to the children, reread the phrase on page 6, *"With room to bloom for everyone."* Ask the children which words rhyme—*room* and *bloom*. Can the children name other words that rhyme with *room* and *bloom*?

Phonics: Make a *g* Garden

Review the sound of the letter *g*. What words in the title and the story start with *g* (*grandmother's* and *garden*)? Make a class "garden" by cutting pictures from magazines or drawing pictures of objects that start with the letter *g*. Glue the pictures onto flower shapes cut from construction paper and tape them to craft sticks. Push the sticks into balls of clay in small pots or in an egg carton. Label the garden *"Grandmother's g Garden."*

Fluency: Echo Reading

As you read the story, have the children echo back to you any part that repeats, such as *"Born from the earth with water and air"* (page 5), *"In Grandmother's garden we are all one"* (page 8), *"We are one"* (page 11), *"A little bit of sunshine and lots of love"* (page 15).

Vocabulary: Word Substitution

Substituting children's names from the class is a great vocabulary activity for *Grandmother's Garden*. Ask the children to put their own names in place of those in the text—listening, "tuning the ear," for the best order of names in rhythm and cadence. This personalizes the song and story. Children can each hear and then sing their names in sequence as you read *Grandmother's Garden*.

Comprehension: Identify What's Important

Ask the children to share what they thought was the most important message of the story. Discuss how children came to their personal conclusions.

Motivation: Exploring Other Cultures

Choose a different country/culture to explore. Learn what clothes are worn, what foods are eaten, what music is listened to, etc. Make a craft from the culture. Ask, "How are people from other countries the same as you? How are they different?"

About John Archambault

John Archambault, who has been a 1st grade teacher, is an author of numerous award-winning books for young children, including the modern classic, *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. He studied Language Arts extensively at Columbia University and the University of New Hampshire. His love of language started early in life and continues in his work with teachers.

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Phonemic Awareness: Rhyming

After reading *To Market, To Market...A Mother Goose Medley* aloud to the children, point out that many of the rhymes in the book feature one or more animals. Ask the children to name the animals. Compose a riddle for each animal such as the following: "Which animal starts with a *k* sound and rhymes with *now (cow)*? Which animal starts with a *sp* sound and rhymes with *rider (spider)*?" etc.

Phonics: The *ee* sound

Read the rhyme on page 14 *(fiddle-de-dee)* several times. Ask the children what sound they hear at the end of each word when they say *"fiddle-de-dee"* and *"bumblebee."* Find the words on the page. What letters make that sound *(ee)*? What other words do they know with the same letters/sound *(see, tree, etc.)*?

Fluency: Reading in Rhythm

Tap a steady beat using a drum (regular or homemade), a metronome, or by clapping or foot tapping (perhaps taped). Read the rhymes to the beat of the drums making sure to stay with the rhythm. Ask the children to join in by beating or tapping along as they repeat the rhymes with you. After performing this activity several times together, ask the children to try this on their own.

Vocabulary: Learning the Meaning of Unfamiliar Words

As you read each rhyme, ask the children to pick out a word or words whose meaning they don't understand. Find out what the words mean (look them up, talk about them, find the meaning from context, etc.). Ask the children to write one of the words on paper and draw a picture to illustrate its meaning. (Some words could be *jig, fiddle, curds and whey, tuffet, stile, sixpence, haste, feast, summoned, crew, revels.*)

Comprehension: Retelling the Sequence of Events

Ask the children to listen as you read one of the rhymes. Ask them what happens first and what happens last. Choose rhymes that have at least two specific events (e.g., *To Market, To Market*—first he goes to buy a pig, then he goes home again; *Hey Diddle Diddle*—first the cow jumps over the moon and last the dish runs away with the spoon). Children will enjoy acting out the sequence of events for their classmates.

Motivation: Acting Out the Rhymes

Divide the children into small groups. Ask each group to act out one of the rhymes. Simple costumes can be made if desired.

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Name

I love the mountains
I love the rolling hills
I love the flowers
I love the daffodils.
I love the firelight.
When all the lights are low
Boom di a da
Boom di a da
Boom di a da
Boom di a da
It's a beautiful world