

VI TIMES

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MN Regions 5 & 7 Vision – O&M Staff

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Literacy Defined

Literacy was once thought to be only the skills of reading and writing. Today we know that literacy includes concept development, understanding cause and effect, knowing one's own world, as well as, reading and writing. Reading and writing are only the methods we use to learn more and tell more about what we know. There are also many ways to read and write!

Early Literacy

Whether your child is going to be a print reader or a braille reader or a combination reader of both, his or her early exposure to books is very important. You will be giving your child the opportunity to learn more and enjoy more interaction as you read books and share experiences with the objects in the books on a regular basis. The book, *On The Way To Literacy* from the American Printing House for the Blind provides several great ideas for early literacy.

"What you select for reading aloud to your child depends upon a number of factors. Whether a book is in print or in braille, you will need to consider:

- your child's age and interests
- her understanding of the concepts presented in the book

"And if a book contains pictures, you will also need to think about:

- your child's degree of vision
- the importance of the book's pictures to understanding the story

"Types of books to read aloud with your child may include:

- *print/braille* children's books in which the text is provided in *both* print and braille
- *braille* children's books
- carefully chosen *print* children's books from the bookstore or library
- books you make based on your child's own experiences, using her own words (**experience stories**)

"In addition, to add meaning and interest to books for a child who cannot view pictures, you may look for the following:

- books that are about real objects, allowing you to gather a few objects for your child to handle as the book is read (**story box** items)
- books that feature things that can be touched on the book's pages—such as **tactile pictures** formed with textures, raised lines, or shapes."

Books for Young Readers

If your child will be a braille reader, of course you want to have braille books available in your child's own library. But don't forget to use as many print or print/braille books as possible, too. You can always use objects to represent the pictures.

Some other points to remember:

- Look for books that involve things your child has experienced.
- Look for books that use words or have pictures that you can use words to describe the story.
- Young children enjoy poetry, songs, chants and rhymes (they will build skills for later reading development).
- Don't forget the children's classics that will give your child experience with stories their friends have also read with their parents.
- Find out what stories are popular and include them in your reading time.
- Use books with silly words, sounds, etc. Make it fun!
- Read predictable books with repeated lines or words together...leave off the part that is repeated for your child to "read".
- Books that tell about things can also be fun. How to make a smile, for example!
- Books about numbers, sounds, shapes, etc. should be included.
- Board books are great for young children.
- Adding tactile symbols to the books can add interest.
- Do some pretend reading together to model it.
- Record some sounds for the pictures in a book and put the sounds on mini-picture frames or switches that will "talk".
- Create story boxes to represent the book (put the main objects of the story in a box to be used as you read together).
- Collect objects on an outing or during an activity to help retell your adventure. Put them on pages or in a box to create your child's own book.
- Make a "Me Book" and add pictures/objects that are important in your child's life. Family members, where you live, things you do, etc.
- Have your young child tell you a story about an "adventure" and write down what he or she says. Then put his or her words into print or braille for a story to be read and re-read.
- Act out stories—ones you read or make up together.
- Use clear transparency material to braille the words in your child's books. It is then placed along with the print so all family members can read the book.
- Don't just listen to taped books, always add objects to illustrate the story heard to make it an active reading and not passive.
- Build a library with your child that can be read and re-read over the years.
- Encourage your child to write their own stories in print or braille (scribbling). Write above it what it means so it can be read together repeatedly.
- When going to a public library story time, include a braille book to hold.

Making Tactile Books

"The following make tactile displays difficult to interpret and should be avoided:

- Clutter—many lines or elements all in one picture
- Many lines that intersect, especially lines of a similar type
- Items placed closer than ¼ inch
- Symbols or items that feel alike
- Shapes less than ½ inch on a side

- Large open outlines without a ‘fill pattern’ making it hard to tell what is in and what is outside the shape” (APH, 1997)

“The following guidelines apply to tactile pictures intended for a young child:

- A tactile picture should show only a few of an object’s most important, or identifying tactile details, such as the stem on an apple to distinguish it from an orange.
- If texture is an important identifier—as it would be for a teddy bear—the tactile picture should include that texture.
- For a very young child, the size of the object in the picture should be close to the actual size of the object in life. Differences in size are especially confusing. A young child will have trouble linking a square shape on a page to her experience of a house! This means some things can’t be meaningfully shown in a tactile picture until she is a little older.
- For a young child, a tactile picture should show only a few objects per page. If necessary, show additional information by breaking it into several separate tactile pictures on separate pages.
- And it is difficult to make a meaningful tactile picture of things that are only visual or are imaginary creations—castles, giants and dinosaurs. Better to choose another story or use words to give your child some sense of these. On the other hand, there may be an important object you can show—such as the magic bean in *Jack and the Beanstalk*—leaving out fanciful creatures and settings.” (APH, 1997)

Past Newsletter Topics

Past VI Times include:

- Introduction to Blindness/Visual Impairment
- Cortical Vision Impairment
- Living Skills
- Low Vision
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orientation & Mobility
- Recreation & Leisure
- Transition
- Braille
- Early Childhood Intervention
- Technology
- Sensory Skills
- Social Skills
- Teaching Social Skills
- Transition & Self-Advocacy

Contact your Teacher for the Blind / Visually Impaired or Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist if:

- You have further questions on the newsletter topic
- Would prefer the newsletter in electronic format by email or in print.