Playing with Words

To understand a spoken language, a child must be able to hear the different sounds and parts of the words that make up the language. By playing with words, children develop phonological awareness. Most children who have phonological awareness have an easier time learning to read.

Here's what you can do at home:

- Help your pre-reader become aware of the smaller sounds that make up words by learning nursery rhymes and making up your own silly, nonsense rhymes together.
- For young preschoolers, play with animal sounds.
- Ask whether two words rhyme: “Do ‘cat’ and ‘hat’ sound alike?” “Do ‘cat’ and ‘dog’ rhyme?”
- Sing songs with your child every day. Songs naturally break words into syllables and are a fun way to learn about word sounds.
- Put two words together to make a new word: “What word would we have if we put ‘cow’ and ‘boy’ together?”
- Begin pointing out beginning sounds of words. “What sound do you hear at the beginning of ‘mom’? That’s right, m-m-m.”
- Leave out the last rhyming word. “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you ______, (are).” Do this with other nursery rhymes, poems and songs that your child knows by heart.
- Say rhymes and sing songs in the language that is most comfortable for you.

Types of books that help your child play with words…

- Rhyming books
- Dr. Seuss books
- Mother Goose Nursery Rhyme books
- Books that illustrate a familiar song
- Books with a rhythm or beat
- Books with animal sounds

Some favorites:

- Llama, Llama, Holiday Drama, by Anna Dewdney
- The Cat in the Hat Comes Back, by Dr. Seuss
- The Real Mother Goose, by Blanche Fisher Wright
- Here We Go ‘Round the Mulberry Bush, illustrated by Sophie Fatus
- Farmyard Beat, by Lindsey Craig

Book of the Month

The Wheels on the Bus, illustrated by Annie Kubler

This sing-along book is perfect for teaching phonological awareness because it has rhyming and sound effects. Your child will delight in making wiper and bus horn noises which help them learn letter sounds. The pages have cutouts that spotlight the verse of the song you’re singing about. This book comes with a CD to sing with.
More fun with *The Wheels on the Bus*...

Homemade instruments...

- Drum — coffee can with lid or oatmeal tub.
- Maracas (shakers) — water bottles or juice cans filled about 1/3 full with rice or dry beans. Seal the top with paper and tape.
- Tambourine — seal two aluminum pie pans or sturdy paper plates together with duct tape, after putting a small handful of dry beans inside.
- Rhythm sticks — hit two wooden spoons or pencils together.

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**Singing with Your Child**

A common reason grown-ups don't sing with children is that they don't think they have a good singing voice. But young children don't really know a good singing voice from a bad one; they just want you to sing with them!

Here are some ways you can help your children get ready to read by singing with them:

- Sing the alphabet song to learn about letters.
- Sing nursery rhymes so children hear the different sounds in words.
- Practice singing and rhyming at home, in the car, while you play, and during “wait” times in lines or at the doctor’s office.
- Clap along to the rhythms in songs so children hear the syllables in words. Here is an example:

  **Twink-le twink-le lit-tle star,**

  How I won-der what you are.

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**Sing Silly Songs**

**Row, Row, Row Your Boat**

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream.

**Now make up new words to the song...**

Row, row, row your car...

**Or make up silly words...**

Tow, tow, tow my goat...

**Nonsense words...**

Bow, bow, bow my doat...

**Sing about where you are going or what you are doing...**

Wash, wash, wash my hands...
Walk, walk, walk to school...

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**What your library can do for you...**

Check at your library for CDs and DVDs of children's songs. You can find special holiday music or songs you can sing year-round!

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