Playing with Words

Some words rhyme, and some words begin with the same sound. Sentences are made up of words, and words can be broken down into smaller parts. Children who begin to notice these things are developing **phonological awareness**, which means being able to hear and work with the sounds in a spoken language.

*Research shows that children who have phonological awareness tend to have an easier time learning to read.*

**Here’s what you can do at home:**

- 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.
- Point out sentences where all the words begin with the same letter (The fat frog fell on Friday).
- Put two words together to make a new word: “What word would we have if we put ‘cow’ and ‘boy’ together?”
- Take words apart. “What little words do you hear in ‘football’?”
- Leave out the last rhyming word: Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you ______, (are). Do this with other rhymes, poems and songs that your child knows by heart.
- Say rhymes and sing songs in the language that is most comfortable for you.

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**Book of the Month**

*Here We Go ’Round the Mulberry Bush, by Sophie Fatus*

What does your child do early in the morning? This story follows four children from around the world as they go through their early morning routines. “This is the way we go to school” is how this story ends—on a bus, walking, and on a bike. How does your child get to school? This sing-along book includes a CD with audio and video animation of the story.

**Other books like this one:**

**Books to play with words…**

- Rhyming books
- Dr. Seuss books
- Books that illustrate a familiar song
- Books with a rhythm or beat

Books with words that begin with the same sound (wokka-wokka, chicken cheeks)
More fun with *Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush*…

**Homemade instruments…**
- **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
- **Drum** — coffee can with lid or oatmeal tub

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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 learn 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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