

T O P

Tips on parenting



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THE RHYTHM OF LIFE

by Mary Gabriel and Julia Torquati

What are the rhythms in your world? How do the sounds, rhythms, and cycles of your daily routines affect you and your child? Imagine that you are gazing upon your sleeping child. In your mind's eye stand near your child and listen. As you hear the gentle sounds of your child's breathing, what do you feel? Is there a sense of peace and calm that surrounds you as you are drawn to the rhythm of your child's gentle breath?

You can support your child's musical awareness and expression by exploring rhythm and sound in your everyday routines. Traditional ways of offering musical experiences to children include singing, playing instruments, and listening to live or recorded music. However, you can also promote your child's musical development by becoming more aware of the rhythms and sounds in your daily life. Rhythms and tones within our bodies and our world are the basis for music in all cultures. Music has predictable, repetitive rhythms, tones, and cycles that echo the predictable repetitive rhythms, tones, and cycles of our bodies and of nature.

"We are deeply rhythmic creatures responding to the rhythms within us and around us."

Tuning into rhythms and cycles in nature can support your child's musical interests and abilities. We are deeply rhythmic creatures responding to the rhythms within us and around us. Our first experiences with rhythms are the sounds we hear in our mothers' wombs, their heartbeats and voices. We are gently rocked as our mothers move through their daily routines, and that rhythm becomes a part of our daily routines. As each of us grows and develops, "we're perpetually dancing to circadian rhythms of sleeping and waking, metabolic rhythms of eating and elimination; hormonal rhythms of ovulation, puberty, menarche, and menopause. These personal beats, in turn, are inextricably linked with planetary cycles of day and night, the waxing and waning of the moon, and the changing of the seasons" (Hoffman, 1995 p. 1). These rhythmic connections are part of ourselves and our world and resonate within us, profoundly affecting our health and well-being.

Where do you begin? Awareness, beginning with reflective listening and observation, is the key. Think about your home environment. What natural sounds



The Rhythm of Life

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do you hear in your neighborhood? Even on a busy work day you can open the windows as you eat your breakfast together to listen to the chirping of birds. Listen and imitate sounds and rhythms. Laugh and listen together. See if your own bird sounds attract any interest outside. Look out the window and hypothesize the origins of their sounds. Observe to see if any creatures come into view to demonstrate their vocal skills. Use these experiences to expand your child's vocabulary as you encounter tweeting, warbling, shrieking, cawing, and squawking. Birdfeeders are a great way to attract birds into your morning view. As they flutter about eating their breakfast, you will hear their music and have opportunities to observe and discuss their daily rhythms with your child. Often the birds will build a nest near your birdfeeder, and you will then be able to observe and hear their nest building, protecting, and maternal feeding routines.

Observe the peace and calm of the moment.

When your schedule allows, meander outside with your child and listen. There is music everywhere. Even very young children will respond to the chirping of birds and crickets as well as the sound of the gentle breezes. Discriminating differences in sounds promotes developmental skills important for language and literacy. Listen carefully and repeat sounds you hear. Hypothesize about who is singing and what the messages might be. Which sounds are light and airy, happy and inviting? What is their purpose? Do the shrill, aggressive sounds startle you? Why might creatures be sounding a warning?

Pick a spot near your home and listen to the natural sounds occurring at different times during the day. How do morning sounds differ from evening sounds? Observe and talk about the kinds of creatures that are singing and chirping in the morning and the kinds that resound as evening falls. Compare and contrast their sleeping and waking cycles.

Investigate the sounds of the wind as the breezes flutter through leaves and branches. Listen and explore the differences in sounds as you sit under a willow tree, a cottonwood tree, a maple tree, or any favorite tree in your neighborhood. Observe how the sounds under various trees are similar and different. Compare and contrast those sounds during different seasons of the year. Discuss how winter winds sound and feel different than summer winds.

Experiment with your breath to create sounds. Blow through your lips to create whistling sounds. Blow against found objects like bottles, hollow reeds, and metal tubes and listen to the sounds created. Make music with the found objects creating rhythms as you blow.

Children often fear thunderstorms and yet they serve an important purpose in our life cycle. Cuddle up together and talk about the rain clouds giving drinks to the thirsty trees and plants. Listen to the raindrops and imitate the rhythms and sounds on a cookie sheet or tabletop by tapping fingers.

Thunderstorms may serve as a provocation for your child's interest in exploring other percussive sounds.

Tap and pound on found objects throughout your home to replicate the thundering sounds outside.

Talk about how different sounds make you feel.

Use found objects to create percussive sounds in your play. Give your child a marble and explore the sounds it makes when tapping it on a wooden table, on glass, on carpeting. Repeat the percussive experiment with other found objects made of wood, metal, cloth, or plastic. Help your child make predictions as he or she explores. Ask which sounds will be higher, lower, softer, or louder?

Together with your child enjoy the rocking motion of a porch swing, a rocking chair, or swings at your local park. Feel the comforting rhythm of the motion that was first experienced in your mother's womb. Try humming, singing, or reciting poetry to the rhythm of the swing's motion. Observe the peace and calm of the moment. Celebrate being connected to your child and to nature's musical rhythms, sounds, and cycles.

According to *Zero to Three*, the National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, rhythmic and musical experiences can:

- Build relationships, communicate feelings, and provide comfort.
- Foster language development through stories, rhyming, and rhythm.
- Develop individuality by allowing children to discover their own sounds and unique styles of music.
- Launch creativity by allowing children to fill in missing words, discover new sounds, or make up songs.
- Develop fine and large muscles through finger plays, dancing, or playing instruments.
- Build coordination by letting children follow a beat and use



their minds, voices, and bodies together (Zero to Three, 2002, p. 4).

At the end of the day, enjoy traditional ways of sharing rhythm and sound by sharing a story, poetry, or song; but also open the window and listen to the day sounds give way to the night sounds. The predictable cycles of day and night, sun and moon, provide security and comfort, like a familiar refrain. Look forward to writing new verses together with each new day that dawns. Together you will laugh, play, and seek rhythms, sounds, and cycles which soothe you, stimulate your curiosity, and connect you to one another as well as to all the breathing, chirping, singing creatures around you.

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question corner

I travel as part of my job. I am finding it hard to stay connected to my children when I'm out of town. Do you have any suggestions for how I can stay involved in my children's lives even when I am away from home?

--Steve in Minnesota



Call your children every night before bed to see how their day went and read them their favorite story before they go to sleep. If this is too expensive, try tape-recording yourself reading your children's favorite storybooks before you leave. Give a new

taped story to your child each time you leave for a business trip. If you will be gone on an extended trip, you can exchange letters, faxes, e-mails, or audio-tapes. Another idea is to create your own home page on the web and add information, stories, and photographs of where you have been and what you were doing on your trip. To learn more about your children's lives, ask them to keep a journal of what they were doing when you were away. Most importantly, when you do return home from a trip be sure to find some special time to spend with each member of your family. I'm sure you are missed!

~Heidi Malloy, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Metropolitan State University.

question corner features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send e-mail to eejcenter@cc.usu.edu or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education, Utah State University, 6705 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6705.

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PARENTS INVOLVED IN THE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN

by Kantaylieniére Hill-Clarke



Young children's success as readers is related to early literacy experiences. Since parents are children's first teachers, they play an integral role in developing young children's love of reading. Although parents impact children's early literacy experiences, they may not be aware of developmentally appropriate best practices in literacy. When parents are equipped with specific strategies on how to support their child's literacy development, they are able to increase their knowledge of effective literacy practices.

Children need loving and caring adults who can stimulate and support their literacy development. Engaging in literacy activities in the home should be fun, enjoyable and non-threatening. The goal is to promote and encourage reading, not to add pressure by turning literacy experiences in the home into formal reading and writing lessons. Parents should begin with what their young children already know (e.g., their name, logos on cereal boxes, popular children's songs). Beginning with what children already know helps to tap into their interests and build on prior knowledge. In addition, by making reading a part of the family's daily routines, parents are supporting children's literacy development and establishing an appreciation of reading.

Parents can create a positive literacy environment by having high quality children's books in the home (e.g., *The Grouchy Ladybug*, *Chrysanthemum*, *The Polar Express*, *The Patchwork Quilt*), reading to their child, engaging in meaningful conversation, and by modeling reading and writing. Other ways parents can support their child's literacy development include:

- Getting a library card and making visits to the library.
- Engaging in a dramatic play with their child by dressing in character using materials and supplies in the home to re-enact a favorite story.
- Creating an ABC collage book. On each sheet, write a letter of the alphabet. Glue on each page pictures from magazines that begin with that letter. Even better, use a camera, take pictures of items around the home, at the local park or in the neighborhood that begin with each letter of the alphabet and glue the pictures on each page in the book.
- Writing as their child dictates a self-generated story. Once the story is complete, the child can draw illustrations. Bind the book using a stapler, yarn, etc. Using a cassette, take turns or together, read the story.

- Creating a *My Family and Me* book by using family photos and writing words or sentences on each page that describe the picture.
- Participating in school events such as family reading night. During this time, teachers are encouraged to discuss their reading programs, daily classroom literacy activities, and share various ways parents can support literacy development at home.

As previously stated, there are a variety of ways that parents can facilitate children's literacy development; however, one of the best ways that parents can learn more about supporting their child's literacy development is by visiting the classroom. Parents can schedule an appointment with the teacher to observe a reading lesson (e.g. guided reading, literature circles, literacy centers, word walls, etc.), volunteer to read to the class or engage, in a small group, tutoring session. For parents who have limited time or are not able to make classroom visits, they can offer their support by having high yet attainable expectations for their child, praising their child's efforts, showing an interest in their child's learning, or by simply placing an "I love you" or "You are special" note in their child's backpack or lunchbox which sends a positive message of love and support to the child. In addition, parents can ask the classroom teacher to send home "home-school activities" that help support children's literacy development and strengthen the home-school partnership (e.g., literacy bags, journal activities, books for read alouds, etc.). Getting involved and supporting children's literacy development not only provides teachers with additional assistance, but also helps parents to have a better understanding of current best practices in literacy instruction.

Another way that parents can get involved in their children's literacy development is by communicating regularly with teachers. Parents can offer valuable insight into their child's literacy experiences. Therefore, parents can share information about their child's interests and reading habits at home, which assists teachers with addressing students' diverse learning needs and planning meaningful lessons. When parents and teachers communicate and work cooperatively together, they make positive contributions to children's literacy development and help young children to acquire healthy reading habits.

In conclusion, parents can support children's



literacy development by providing a literacy-rich environment, engaging in meaningful talk time, reading aloud to their children, and communicating with their child's teachers. Doing so fosters literacy development in young children and allows them to enjoy a positive relationship with reading and writing.

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~Kantaylieniére Hill-Clarke, Ed.D. is an assistant professor of Reading at the University of Memphis. Her research interests include best practices in literacy instruction and teacher preparation.

activity

corner

Cooking with Children!

Learning how to cook is fun! As children learn to cook, they learn important literacy skills by reading recipes, and math skills by counting and measuring ingredients. Parents can help children incorporate these skills into cooking by writing the recipes in large print and adding a picture of each ingredient. Try out this tasty recipe with your preschool or school-age children.

TUNA MELT

2 pieces of bread



1 slice of tomato



1/8 cup of shredded cheddar cheese



2 Tablespoons of Tuna Salad



Toast in oven at 400 degrees until cheese melts.



Book Review

The Natural World in Children's Books

by Sylvia Read

Children are curious about the natural world. They pick up and examine worms. They hoard leaves, sticks, and rocks. They are fascinated by birds' eggs. The more they know about something, the more fascinated they become. For example, in my second grade class we read a picture book about the life cycle of a ladybug. Once the children had seen what ladybug eggs looked like, they found them all over the trees on the playground. They began using the words pupa and larvae in conversations with other children. They asked questions about the stages of development. As teachers and parents, we sometimes think that young children only want to hear fun stories, but these five books will teach your child about the natural world and entertain them.

We're Rabbits written by Lisa Westberg Peters and illustrated by Jeff Mack (Harcourt, 2004) was inspired by the author's experiences with the wild rabbits that live in her woodpile and regularly invade her garden. The book is written in pleasant rhyme that incorporates the refrain "We're rabbits!" The illustrations were done with acrylic paints in a slightly impressionistic cartoonish style with bright, appealing colors. The gardener clearly feels territorial about her garden, but instead of hurting the rabbits, she tries to lure them away from her vegetables.

Diary of a Wombat by Jackie French and illustrated by Bruce Whatley (Clarion Books, 2002) also depicts the interactions between wild animals

and humans. A cuddly-looking wombat narrates the story through her diary entries that record her habits, which include mostly digging holes, eating, and sleeping. She eventually trains the humans to feed her oats and carrots when grass gets boring. The author lives in Australia with several wombats, so it's clear she is acquainted with their habits. The illustrations support the text and add to the humor of the story.

Blue Sky Bluebird written and illustrated by Rick Chrustowski (Henry Holt, 2004) tells the story of two bluebirds and the birth and development of their four chicks. Through an engaging story of learning to eat, fly, and hunt, children will learn words like "clutch," "nestling," "fledgling," "plumage," and "juvenile." The illustrations were done in layers of vibrant colored pencil on watercolor paper. One set of inset illustrations and text shows the inside of an egg and explains the development of the embryo.

My Light written and illustrated by Molly Bang (Scholastic, 2004) explains all the ways the energy of the sun affects our lives. The language is poetic, yet informative. The illustrations are realistic, but the colors are used to emphasize the sun's energy in yellow against intensely colored backgrounds of blue, purple, green, and black. The book tracks the energy of the sun all the way to a child turning on a lamp in a bedroom at night. "From rushing wind and water, from burning coal, from silent solar cells, you let my energy into your room."

An "About This Book" note at the end explains how the author came to write the book and contains technical information about energy production through hydroelectric dams, lightning, wind turbines, burning of coal, and solar cells.

Rain, Rain, Rain Forest written by Brenda Z. Guiberson and illustrated by Steve Jenkins (Henry Holt, 2004) contains a wealth of information about the rainforest, but the language is exciting and descriptive. "Splitter, splat, splash! Rain gushes into the rain forest. It soaks the moss, drizzles off the dangling vines, and thrums against slick waxy leaves that serve as umbrellas for dozens of small creatures. Twenty feet of rain can fall in a year, and most of the time the forest is squishy like a swamp. In this deluge, every crevice and cup high in the trees overflows with water." From this description of the environment, the author goes on to describe all the animals that live in the rainforest from the sloth, who is so wet that green algae grows in his fur, to a six-foot iguana. The illustrations are realistic-looking even though they were created using cut-paper collage.

~Sylvia Read is a former 1st and 2nd grade teacher who now teaches language arts and children's literature classes to preservice and inservice teachers at Utah State University.





Shadow puppetry can provide an engaging indoor activity for children during the winter months when it's too cold to go outside and can help them develop literacy skills as well as knowledge of science concepts. Many young children have scientific misconceptions related to shadows making it a great topic for them to explore. Very young children may think that shadows are simply dark images, an actual presence of an object that is independent of the object that is causing the shadow. Even older elementary age children may believe that shadows are reflections of light rather than understanding that shadows are simply caused by an object blocking light. Providing opportunities to challenge strongly held scientific misconceptions is the best method for changing these incorrect ideas. Simply telling the correct answer often does little to change an idea that children have created for themselves.

What is Shadow Puppetry?

The first shadow puppet productions were done in China about 2,000 years ago. Brightly burning torches provided the light source for early shadow puppeteers who created elaborate, complex shadow puppets. Shadow puppetry requires three things: a source of light, a screen, and something put between the source of light and the screen that will create a shadow. Possible light sources include desk lamps, bulbs with reflectors, slide projectors or overhead projectors. Where the light source is placed in relation to the screen will have to be determined based on the kind of light source that is used and the dimensions of the screen. There are many options where screens are concerned. White art paper, a white bed sheet, or a white plastic shower curtain liner will all work, although the plastic shower curtain liner is the best option--because it offers better light diffusion, it will provide a much better image. Hanging a sheet or a shower curtain liner from the ceiling is probably the easiest way to make a large screen. For a smaller screen, you can construct a tabletop frame from wood or plastic PVC pipe that is inexpensively available from lumber, plumbing, or hardware stores. A PVC screen is the kind that I personally use because it is easy to construct using plastic corner connectors, it folds flat for storage, and is easy to transport from place to place. Using Velcro, simply attach a piece of plastic shower curtain to the PVC frame, making sure it is pulled tight so it will provide a smooth surface.

In beginning with shadow puppetry, it's a good idea to let children simply "mess around" with creating images. The audience sits in front of the screen while the person making the shadow is behind the screen. Children's bodies can actually create shadows. They can create profile images or face the screen which will create a totally different effect. There are

also shadow images that can be created by using a hand to create different shapes. What child doesn't like to make the well-known "rabbit" shadow with their hands given the opportunity! Later, children can remove themselves from the picture and can use other objects to make shadows or cut out shapes from poster board that can be attached to a wooden stick (paint stirrer, popsicle stick, dowel, or plastic drinking straw). Very simple shadow puppets like these work just great. Some shadows, like background scenery, can remain static while shadow puppets can be moved to create action in a story. Children can make puppets to act out their favorite stories, create a reader's theater, or even write their own original shadow plays.

Here are some possible questions that adults can use to encourage exploration:

- When you move the object casting the shadow, what does the shadow do?
- How can you make a shadow bigger?
- How can you make a shadow smaller?
- How can you change the shape of a shadow?
- What happens when you move the object closer to the light source?
- How can you make a shadow taller or shorter?
- How does this apply to shadows you see outside that are caused by the sun?

An excellent resource for shadow puppetry is:

Wisniewski, D. and Wisniewski, D. (1997). *World of Shadows: Teaching with Shadow Puppetry*. Englewood, Colorado: Teacher Ideas Press. ISBN: 1-56308-450-3

For more fun with shadows, try reading a shadow casting bedtime story using a flashlight to project the image on the wall as you read the story. One of my favorites is:

Robinson, L. (1998). *William and the Magic Ring: A Shadow Casting Bedtime Story*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts. ISBN: 0-87846-467-0

Have fun with shadows! Perhaps, on February 2nd children will want to do a shadow puppet play related to Groundhog Day! This can lead to another science investigation - Does Mr. Groundhog's prediction hold true or is it just a fun bit of folklore? Science is everywhere and one question almost always leads to another!

~Rebecca Monhardt is an associate professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Utah State University.



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