

# Developing vocabulary through sharing books with 3-4-year-olds

Beverley Jones  
(Early Years Consultant)

10<sup>th</sup> April 2025

A copy of these slides will be available on the SLG:

[Recent slides from CPD training \(Learning & Development\) | Shropshire Learning Gateway](#)

## Aims:

- To be aware of the importance of vocabulary in child development and the impact on their future.
- To understand the role books play in developing and improving vocabulary.

# What the evidence tells us:

- Babbling around the age of **7 months** is a strong predictor of later language production.
- **By 22 months** – a child's development can predict outcomes at age 26.
- **By 2 years** – 75% of a child's brain growth has occurred. The experiences of the child physically affect the brain structure.
- **By 4 years** – the difference in the number of words different groups of children hear is 19 million.
- **By 5 years** – a child's vocabulary will predict their educational success and outcomes at age 30.

## Why?

“The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development... Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive. Through conversation, storytelling and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.”

Communication and language

[Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework - GOV.UK](#)

## Why?

“It is crucial for children to develop a life-long love of reading.

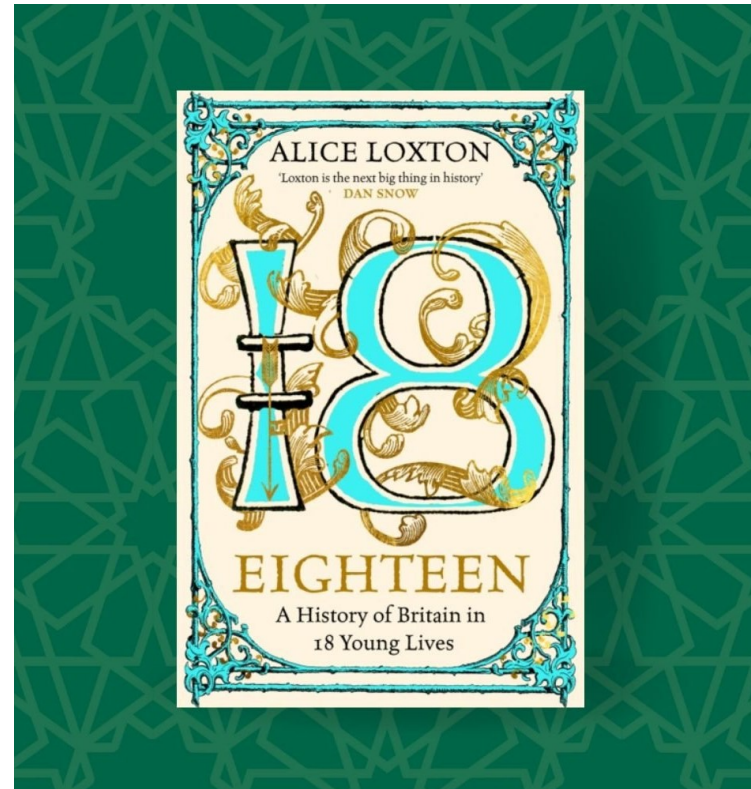
Reading consists of two dimensions: language comprehension and word reading. Language comprehension (necessary for both reading and writing) starts from birth. It only develops when adults talk with children about the world around them and the books (stories and non-fiction) they read with them, and enjoy rhymes, poems and songs together. Skilled word reading, taught later, involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Writing involves transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech, before writing).”

Literacy

[Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61232/early_years_foundation_stage_statutory_framework.pdf)

## Did you know ...?

- The vocabulary encountered in stories can be 10 times more diverse than the vocabulary we use in everyday conversation.





# Did you know ...?

## Incy Wincy Spider

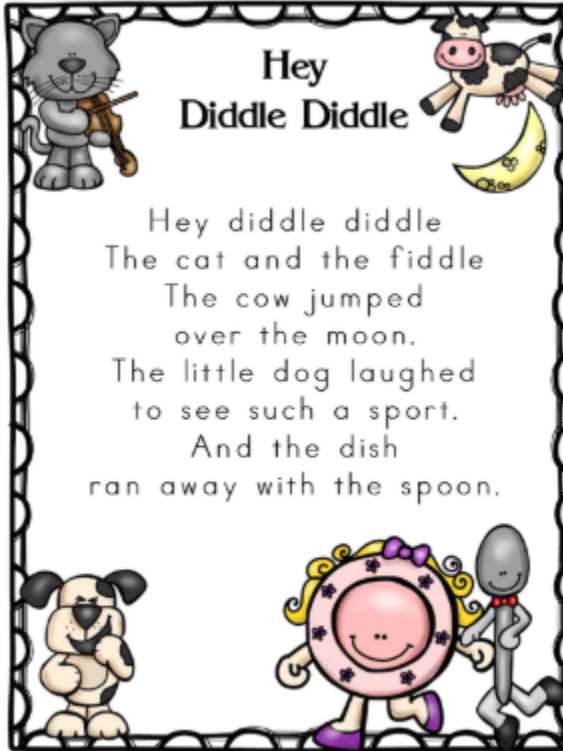
Incy Wincy Spider  
Climbed up the water spout.  
Down came the rain  
And washed poor Incy out.  
Out came the sunshine  
And dried up all the rain.  
And Incy Wincy Spider  
Climbed up the spout again.



© Copyright 2014. www.sparklebox.co.uk

## Hey Diddle Diddle

Hey diddle diddle  
The cat and the fiddle  
The cow jumped  
over the moon.  
The little dog laughed  
to see such a sport.  
And the dish  
ran away with the spoon.



Picture Poem Cards from [www.sparklebox.co.uk](http://www.sparklebox.co.uk) © 2012 Page 1/16

## Little Miss Muffet

Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on a tuffet  
Eating her curds and whey.

Along came a spider  
Who sat down beside her,  
And frightened Miss Muffet away!



© Copyright 2014. www.sparklebox.co.uk

75% of our vocabulary comes from our reading.

“A child who is read to will have an inner kingdom of unicorns, talking spiders and a knife that cuts into other worlds. The mind is like a ‘tardis’; it may seem small but inside there are many mansions. Each great book develops the imagination and equips the reader with language.”

Pie Corbett

[www.scholastic.co.uk/piecorbett](http://www.scholastic.co.uk/piecorbett)



“Language comprehension (necessary for both reading and writing) starts from birth. It only develops when adults talk with children about the world around them and the books (stories and non-fiction) they read with them, and enjoy rhymes, poems and songs together.”

[Help for early years providers : Reading comprehension](#)

## Worrying trends:

- 1 in 3 young people say they enjoy reading in their spare time.
- 18.5% of children surveyed didn't have any books at home.



# The vocabulary gap:

Disadvantaged  
children hear 30  
million fewer words  
than their peers by  
the age of 3.

Hart and Risley (1995)

[Let's Stop Talking About The '30 Million Word Gap' : NPR](#)

“You should provide a wide range of reading experiences to help children develop a love of reading, curiosity and wonder about the world around them. Providing a well sequenced reading curriculum to develop children’s knowledge of language and how it works, can create fluent, passionate and lifelong readers.”

[Help for early years providers : Reading comprehension](#)

# The best time to share stories:

- When do you share stories with your children?
- Do you share stories with your key children individually or in a small group everyday?
- Where do you share books?



# Core books and rhymes:

## Books and Rhymes 3-4 Year Olds

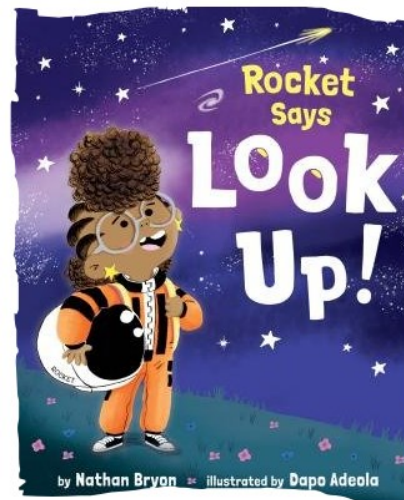
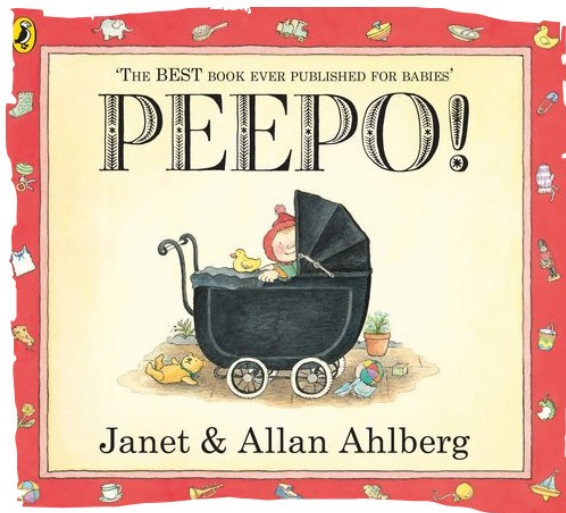
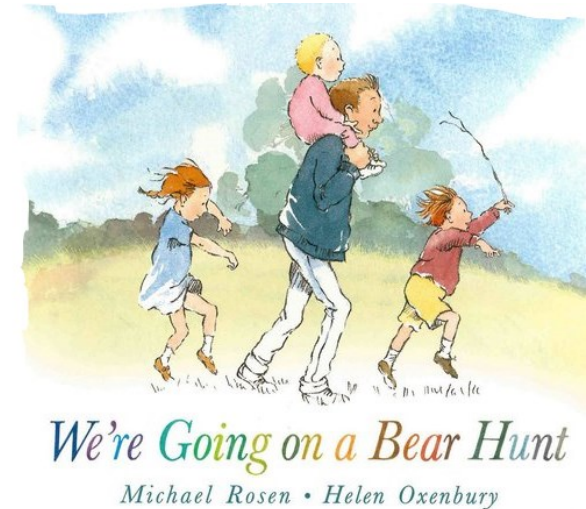
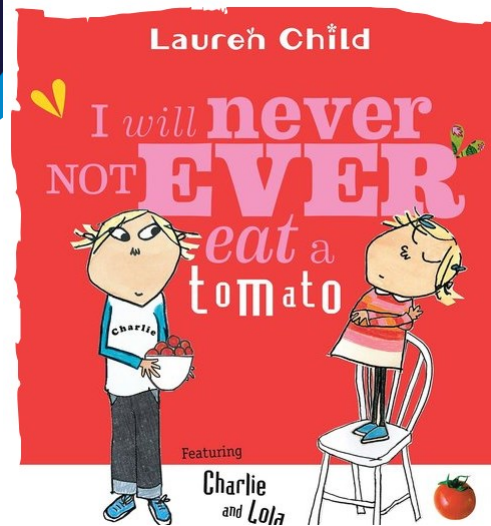
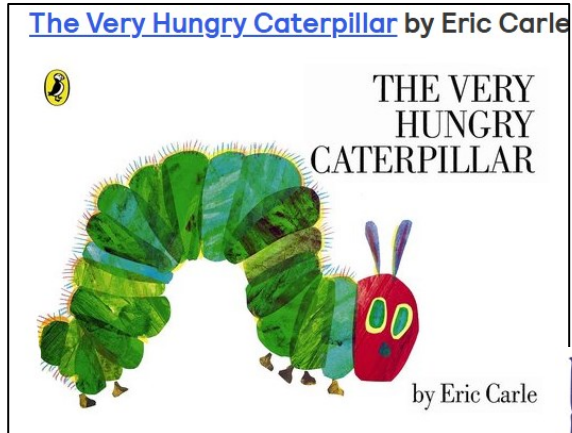
---

- ▶ Autumn Term
- ▶ Spring Term
- ▶ Summer Term

[Books and Rhymes 3-4 Year Olds – Sheringham Nursery](#)



# Top 10 reads for under 5's:



- Ruby's Worry by Tom Percival
- The Smartest Giant in Town by Julia Donaldson
- Barbara Throws a Wobbler by Nadia Shireen
- So Much by Trish Cookie
- Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak



## Over to you ...

Share your top 3 favourite classic books for 3-4 year-olds.





# Communication and language approaches

Very high impact for very low cost based on moderate evidence

Implementation cost ?

Evidence strength ?

Impact (months) ?

£

£

£

£

£

🔒

🔒

🔒

🔒

🔒

+7

months

Communication and language approaches in the early years can be grouped and include:

- Approaches that support the linguistic aspects of communication, such as teaching and modelling vocabulary and language
- Approaches that simultaneously support both cognitive and linguistic aspects of communication, such as interactive reading or collaborative talk...

1

Communication and language approaches typically have a very high impact and increase young children's learning by seven months.

---

2

Positive effects have been identified on early language and literacy skills. When selecting strategies it is important to consider outcomes.

---

3

Staff are very likely to benefit from training or professional development to use programmes and approaches successfully.

---

4

There are many communication and language approaches. High quality provision is likely to include multiple strategies across vocabulary, language, talk and social communication skills.

# How do you involve parent carers?



# What are your thoughts on ...?

- Story telling spaces
- Daily rhyme time
- Stories are told not read
- Book of the week
- Books in the environment
- Planned daily story time
- Story corners with adult seating
- Calm environment with reduced distractions
- Stories revisited frequently

## Next steps:

- Have a good look through all your books or look at what can be borrowed from local libraries checking which ones work for you.
- Use books that support question development, helping children improve their understanding of what's happening.
- Make sure your book choices give you lots to talk about and enjoy with your children.
- Choose books for different purposes, for example to extend vocabulary, get an emotional response or broaden their experiences of real or imagined worlds.
- Repeat readings of the same stories with the children.
- Discuss favourite books with your colleagues or other providers. Compare notes, and exchange ideas. Ask which ones they use, and why.





2

# A curriculum for communication and language

0:37 / 22:05 • Curriculum for developing children's communication and language >

[Part 2 - Early years curriculum: A curriculum for communication and language](#)

## On reflection ...

- To be aware of the importance of vocabulary in child development and the impact on their future.
- To understand the role books play in developing and improving vocabulary.

## Q&A:





## And finally ...

“Stories are an important part of life. Loving printed books and developing an enjoyment of looking at or hearing stories is an integral part of early years practice. Research shows that the amount of input young children receive from the adults around them makes a significant difference to how children learn to read and write in reception classes.”

[Help for early years providers : Reading comprehension](#)