

## Planting the Seeds

by Catherine Shefski, [Pre-K Smarties.com](http://Pre-K Smarties.com)

One of my most vivid childhood memories is the day I learned how to read. My parents were reading the Sunday paper, and I was pestering my father to read "Nancy" from the comics to me. I remember saying something like "if you'd just show me how, I'd read it myself." Well, that was the day everything clicked and by that afternoon I was reading Blondie!

From that day on, my favorite time was before anyone in the house was awake on the morning after a library visit. I would stay under the blanket with my new books until breakfast. Today I see my three children enjoying books as much as I did as a child. There are piles of books before bed, books right next to the bed for early-morning reading, books in the kitchen for reading during snacktime, comic books, science books, mysteries, and kids magazines.

Once someone asked me if I taught my children to read early or if they just started to read on their own. It seemed to me that they just started reading on their own, but I am convinced that I had been teaching them since birth, not with a reading program or specific method, but by planting the seeds at an early age.

Much has been written about the importance of reading to children from an early age, talking to children, and playing rhyming games. In addition, I believe that reading comes much easier when parents introduce the letter SOUNDS before the letter NAMES. Point to letters on signs, magnetic letters on the fridge, letters on packaging, and identify the letters by the sounds they make. Begin by using the short sound "a" as in "cat" rather than the letter name "a" as in "rain", "e" as in "bed" rather than "e" as in "eat", etc. Before she was talking, my daughter was pointing to the letter "h" and making a huffing "h" sound. It wasn't until after she was reading that she really knew the letter name "h."

When you know your child is ready for success, join two or three letters together and help her string the letter sounds together to make simple words. Start with three letter words with the short vowel sound in the middle. I started with the word "hot" because I knew my daughter was confident with the huffing "h" sound, the short "o" sound, and the "t" sound. That was how she had identified those letters to this point, so stringing them together was the logical next step.

Soon you can introduce the silent "e" at the end and show your child how a word can change from "hop" to "hope", for example. You can write the letters on index cards, use the tiles from a game like Scrabble or Upwords, or cut out letters from a computer printout. Don't spend too long on this activity, just about five minutes at a time.

Another teaching tip is to introduce simple "sight" words early. Using large bright letters, write two or three words on index cards and bring them out once or twice a week. I started by showing my children the words "it," "the," and "I." You can choose from the list of [dolch](#) words or just use your instincts. I would keep this list very short and only try it when you and your child are involved in a quiet activity such as coloring or doing a puzzle. As with the letter activity above, only spend a few minutes with these words. See the links below for ideas to make the dolch words into little games.

After several months of these letter and word games you can introduce a special first book. Choose a new book, one your child hasn't seen yet and one that you know will interest him. Try to find a book with large print, colorful pictures and words you know he'll be able to sound out. Point to the words and help him sound out each word.

Remember, you have prepared your child for success. If your child is not ready, don't push it. Just put the book away and try again in a few weeks or months. Only when I was sure there was no chance of failure and discouragement did we read our first book together, taking turns reading out

loud. Hop on Pop was a favorite first book in our house.

By adding these "seeds" to your recipe of reading out loud, rhyming and wordplay, you will see that reading will come easier to your child. The day your child discovers he already knows how to read will be a celebration. And when reading is truly effortless, the world will open up to your child.

### **Sites of interest to parents teaching children to read early:**

[Dolch Sight Word Games](#)

[Baby's Alphabet](#)

*Catherine Shefski, former teacher and mother of three, is the owner of [Pre-K Smarties](#), an online resource for parents of preschoolers. At Pre-K Smarties you can find articles about teaching reading early, children's software reviews, links to the best online preschool learning games, and much more. Parents with older siblings can visit [Aardvark-Kids](#), Pre-K Smarties' sister site.*

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