

Suggestions to encourage **PLAYING** during storytime

Playing has many benefits for children. Through play, young children develop social skills, learn how to interpret their feelings, and process life experiences by reenacting them. Related to reading, children learn symbolism through play—that one thing can stand in for another, such as an upside down pot standing in for a drum—which will help them when they begin to learn the alphabet and must understand that letters are symbols that stand in for sounds.

Dress Up/Props

Encourage imaginative play, which allows children to practice and develop their language and social skills, by providing items and areas for the children to play. Play stores, lab coats, toy groceries and food, etc. can be used during a post-storytime play session, or left in your department for free play.

Puppets

Puppets are always a popular choice for storytime! If you're uncomfortable giving them a "voice," try using them as props—for instance, when singing "Old MacDonald," hold up a puppet for the next animal you are going to sing about. Or, have a puppet lead a round of "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" or "Simon Says." Consider making puppets available to kids to play with during or after storytime.

Parachute

Parachutes are a lot of fun! If you shake them to music as a group, children can feel the rhythm, which will help with phonological awareness.

Pretend You Are an Animal

Asking the children to pretend they are a particular animal—walking or dancing like the animal, making the animal's noises, etc.—engages them to use their imagination.

Sorting Games, Pattern Repetition Games, Puzzles

These types of games are a playful way to engage children and build on their vocabulary knowledge, hand-eye coordination, problem solving skills, and much more! You can play simple flannel board guessing games like "[Little Mouse](#)" during storytime, or set out more tactile games during a play period after storytime—or even keep them out and available in your department at all times!

Manipulative/Stacking/Rolling Toys

Provide toys children can pick up and move around to encourage fine motor skills. Offer them post-storytime or incorporate them into your program, such as with the song "[I Roll the Ball to You](#)," which is a fantastic welcoming song for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. If the children are very young, ask the accompanying adult to answer for the child and to assist with the rolling.

Finger Plays and Songs with Motions

Finger plays and songs that include hand motions get the child's whole body involved in feeling the rhythm and rhyme, and in practicing their fine motor skills. Of course, the songs themselves are also beneficial for phonological awareness!