

# Supporting At-Home Literacy

**When reading and writing are encouraged both at home and in school, children not only learn to read, but learn to love it!**

**BY LYNN COHEN**

**D**uring the last week of kindergarten, Brad spread his mat on the carpet and collected books from our classroom library to read while he rested. In front of him was a pile of his favorites, books we had read and reread in shared reading sessions during the year. There was a big book, a fairy tale, a nonfiction book, two alphabet books, and a book written by a classroom author.

As I watched Brad “read” the pictures and retell the stories of his chosen books, I noticed a sullen expression on his face. “What’s wrong, Brad?” I asked. He replied, “I’m going to miss all these books when school is over.” I found a bag and together we filled it with Brad’s favorite classroom literature to take home to read with his parents. I included in the bag a list of the books’ titles, so his parents could

---

*Lynn Cohen is a kindergarten teacher in Long Island, New York. She also conducts research and writes about literacy.*



borrow them from the local library. I wanted Brad and his family to be able to continue the storybook reading he had grown passionate about in my classroom.

### **Home and School Partnerships**

Literacy, the process of learning to read and write, begins at home. It does not officially begin at a particular age; it develops as children gain experience with language and print

and learn the purposes for reading and writing. Literacy development is enhanced at home as children are read picture books, as they observe parents take telephone messages and write shopping lists, read many kinds of environmental print, and draw or write in their own way in an attempt to copy letters or names.

Once children are in school, the experiences provided by parents con-

ROSS WHITAKER

tinue to influence literacy development. As teachers, we know most children will learn to read and write. But whether they will acquire a disposition for reading depends on the help and encouragement given at home and at school. Home and

school partnerships built upon communication and understanding provide children with a firm foundation for successful literacy experiences. Here are some ways to enhance communication and support ongoing literacy at home:

### Parents as Reading Partners:

Invite parents into the classroom to read with children on a regular basis. Encourage them to reread a book they loved as a child, then share it with the class. Try to be flexible to accommodate schedules of working parents. Have a reading celebration! Parents can be invited to spend a day in the class reading favorite literature and writing stories.

**Book Backpacks:** It's one thing to explain to parents the benefits of reading books aloud with their children, another to provide support for making this a favorite habit. One way you can do this is to send home several books each week in a backpack. Select titles on the basis of children's interests and themes you are studying in the classroom. Don't forget to include homemade books by either the class or the individual child. To make it easy for parents to return the entire contents of the backpack, include an inventory card listing the titles and authors.

**Writer's Suitcase:** A portable writer's suitcase, packed with many kinds of paper and writing tools, is a send-home idea that will help parents extend the benefits of your classroom writing center. Children can bring along their suitcases,

## Ideas to Support At-Home Literacy

possibly shoe boxes, when they visit relatives, go to the doctor, or travel on vacation. The entire alphabet written on a piece of construction paper, and even a simple picture dictionary and alphabet books can be included.

### Summer Vacation Journal:

Encourage family writing experiences over the summer by sending home a simple vacation journal that you make in your classroom. Construct a blank book about 10 pages in length and title it *My Summer Vacation*. On the first page, list literacy activities children and families can share over the months ahead. For example, a child could draw or write about places the family visits, special summertime activities, favorite book characters, or scenes in literature. Support parents' acceptance and valuing of their children's work by attaching a few paragraphs or a photocopied article that explains invented spelling and other early reading and writing techniques their children may use.

**Recipes:** Cooking appeals to children's senses and provides a wealth of learning and literacy activities. Select simple recipes made in school with a few steps that children can follow independently. Write them on recipe cards or make rebus recipe charts to photocopy, and send them home. Parents can

## Good Books for Summer Reading

*Fireflies* by Julie Brinckloe (Macmillan, 1986)

A young boy goes outside on a summer night to catch fireflies. He is delighted with his catch, but sadly realizes he must let the fireflies go.

*Blueberries for Sal* by Robert McCloskey (Viking Children's Books, 1948)

A little girl and a bear cub switch places by mistake in a blueberry patch.

*Wild Wild Sunflower Child Anna* by Nancy White Carlstrom (Macmillan, 1987)

Anna, the sunflower child, discovers nature as she runs and jumps through fields, gardens, and creeks.

*Koala Lou* by Mem Fox (Harcourt Brace & Co., 1989)  
Koala Lou loved for her mother to tell her how much she loved her. This is a touching story of enduring motherly love.

*We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen (Macmillan, 1989)  
A family sets out with gusto to hunt a bear.

*A Beach Day* by Douglas Florian (Greenwillow Books, 1990)  
A rhyming book of a day at the beach. The last page illustrates shells found along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

help children read and cook the recipes. Together they can sequentially add ingredients, recognize food names, and become familiar with abbreviations. Families can compile several recipes into a cookbook that's read together.