

Sharing high-quality books with very young children is such a valuable experience for them because it has so many levels of interest and appeal. Think about the books that are consistent favorites for the infants and toddlers you know. It's likely that those books, as well as favorite rhymes, finger plays, and songs, share several of the following characteristics that make them so appealing to young children.

The Sounds of the Words Are Fascinating and Fun



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Many books are appealing to infants and toddlers as they are read aloud because of the language sounds they feature. The same is true for many of children's favorite rhymes and songs. Very young children who are just beginning to learn about and make sense of a language are very interested in listening to, reproducing, and playing with language sounds (i.e., phonemes), which certain books, rhymes, and songs highlight.

Their Predictability Is Comforting

Other books, rhymes, and songs feature an element of repetition. Young children, who are geniuses at noticing patterns, quickly notice and remember the repeating element of the story or song. They are then able to anticipate and participate in some way in the storytelling, which is enormously fun and satisfying, not to mention being great practice for language production! However, even if literal repetition is not part of the construction of the story, when storybooks are read often enough to become familiar, children enjoy knowing what's coming next. That familiarity is what drives children to ask for the same stories to be read over and over; it takes the sharing of the story to a deeper, very satisfying level.



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The Illustrations Are Appealing, Intriguing, Humorous, or Beautiful

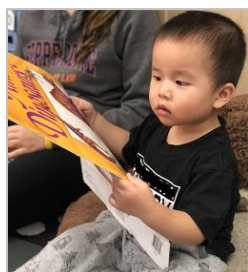


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Some children's books become favorites, at least in part, because of the illustrations. For infants and toddlers, for whom the written words on the page have no specific meaning yet, the illustrations are a very important part of the shared book experience. Intriguing illustrations can lead to thoughtful explorations and deep discussions with toddlers that go well beyond the words on the page. It's important to remember that, for infants and toddlers, the images on the pages are an important part of the appeal of a book.

They Connect to and Expand on Children's Experiences

Images of and stories about familiar people, settings, and experiences are very interesting to young children as they make meaning of and connections to the world around them. That is why it's so important that there are books available that represent all the children in a classroom or program, so each child can see familiar images. Yet it is also the case that young children find it appealing to see and hear about something unfamiliar. Remember, they are by nature very curious! When educators start with the familiar in a book or story and then expand the child's knowledge with a new word or concept, children are intrigued.



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When Shared, They Meet Social–Emotional Needs



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Reading together, saying rhymes and finger plays together, and singing favorite songs together all have an undeniable social–emotional component that contributes in a powerful way to their appeal and to their potential as a learning tool. For example, being held during reading or hearing a favorite lullaby feels comforting, relaxing, and safe. Being able to hold the book and turn the pages offers children an opportunity to participate and contribute in a way that satisfies their desire for independence and mastery. Silly stories, songs, and rhymes can change the emotional climate of a whole room of toddlers (and their educators)!

With all of these appealing features, it's no wonder that books, storytelling, songs, and rhymes are time-honored favorites of young children and educators alike. Use these five characteristics as lenses to see them from children's perspective as you evaluate and select early literacy materials and experiences for your own program.