

Story Power

A guide to helping children
read and write at home



Saliba

Welcome!

School is not the only place where teaching and learning happen! What families do at home often offers children their first and most important literacy lessons.

When you believe that your children will become successful readers and writers, and you let them know this, they will feel that this goal is within their reach. And, as you take the time to tell them stories and to read and write with them, they experience the ways in which literacy can be satisfying and useful.

Do you want to know how to help your children with reading and writing? Then this Story Power guide is for you! In it you can find suggestions on sharing books and stories with your children, and how to encourage them to write. You'll also find information on starting your own reading club at home!

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Enjoy travelling with your children on their literacy journeys!

The Nal'ibali team

PS: This guide is available in eleven South African languages. Look out for other guides in the Story Power series! Go to www.nalibali.org to find them.



Making literacy part of your home



If you read and write regularly with your children at home, you teach them that reading and writing are important, useful and enjoyable. This helps make literacy learning easier for them.

Everyone at home has a role to play in developing young children's reading and writing. Here are some ideas to make literacy an enjoyable part of everyday family life.

- ★ **Create a story routine.** Set aside time every day to read and/or tell stories. Many children enjoy listening to stories at bedtime, but some children may find it easier to concentrate at other times in the day. Choose a time of day that works best for all of you.
- ★ **Tell stories.** Tell your children stories, sing songs and recite poems you know. This stimulates their imagination and develops their language. Listen to their stories too, and remember to show your appreciation.

- ★ **Share books.** Spend just 15 minutes a day reading storybooks aloud to your children. Make it a relaxed and enjoyable time. When your children realise that stories can be found in books, and that books are full of magical pleasure, they will try to read for themselves. Good readers at school are often the ones who read at home with family and friends.
- ★ **Be a role model.** Children learn more from watching what we do than from what we tell them to do! Let your children see you reading for pleasure and to find information, for example, reading books, recipes, school notices, magazines and newspapers. Make sure they see you use writing in your daily life too, for example, writing a shopping list, sending an email or recording an appointment in your diary. When our children see us reading and writing regularly, they realise it is useful and powerful and start incorporating it into their own lives too.
- ★ **Use your home language.** First stories should be in your children's home language. Children should read and write in their home language before they learn to do this in other languages. A strong foundation in their home language is the key to all successful learning – including learning to read and write – because to learn well, they need to understand well.



Sharing books and stories

Share books and stories with your children to help build a strong and loving bond with them while also helping to develop the literacy skills that are so important for their success at school and beyond.



Reading to your children

Reading helps to open your children's eyes, hearts and minds to other people and to different situations. And, when they enjoy the stories you share with them, they are likely to want to continue reading for pleasure throughout their lives.

Here are ten tips for reading to your children, no matter what their age.

1. Invite – but don't force – your children to read with you for at least 15 minutes every day.
2. Find somewhere quiet and comfortable to read. Beds and couches make good indoor reading places. Turn off the radio, TV and computer.
3. Ask your children to choose a book for you to read together. This shows that you care about what they think, and they are more likely to engage with a book that they have chosen themselves!
4. Start by spending some time looking at and talking about the book's front cover. Don't forget to read the story's title and the names of the author and illustrator.
5. Sit close together and encourage your children to hold the book themselves or to help you do this. Younger children enjoy turning the pages. Invite older readers to read the words of one of the characters or a paragraph or two of the story.
6. Try different things to make stories come alive! Use different voices for different characters. Read softly in quiet, gentle parts of a story. Read quickly if a character is in a hurry, or is being chased. Read in a big, booming voice for loud noises in the story.
7. Help your children develop their prediction skills by asking, "What do you think is going to happen next?" at different points in the story.
8. Talk about the story together. Encourage your children to share their opinions of the ways in which the characters in the story behave and the choices they make.
9. If the book has illustrations, look closely at them together. Comment on things you are curious about or that you notice and like. Encourage your children to do the same.
10. But, most of all, simply enjoy sharing different books together. Relax and do whatever it takes to make these times fun for all of you.



Other story ideas

Here are some other ideas for using stories at home.

Make special story times

Create story times that the whole family can enjoy together. For example, have "story suppers"! Once a week, let a different family member tell a story during supper time. This story could be one that they have read or heard, or a new one that they have made up. You could also create a story together by letting one family member tell the beginning of a story and then letting everyone else add a bit to the story until it is complete.

Ask questions

Deepen your children's understanding of the stories you read and tell by asking open-ended questions. These kinds of questions have no right or wrong answers. They develop children's thinking about stories. For example, "How would you feel if ...?", "If you were him, what would you have done?", "Why do you think she did that?", "What does that remind you of?", "What do you do when ...?".

Let your children ask questions too! Answer them if you can or look for the answers together by re-reading and discussing relevant parts of the story.

Explore stories

Find ways for children to explore a story you have told or read to them. For example, they could retell and act out parts of the story, draw a picture inspired by it, or write a letter to one of the story characters.



Repeat stories

Children often like to hear their favourite stories again and again! Each time they listen to or read a story they love, they discover something new. They also absorb lessons about language, vocabulary and concepts.

Find books to read

Books are expensive to buy, so if you have a library near you, visit it regularly with your children. Ask the librarian to recommend interesting books in the language/s your children understand well. Allow plenty of time to browse, then chat to your children about their choices before they make their final decision about which books to borrow.

Develop children's confidence

Value your children's attempts to read on their own, just like you valued their first words! Give them lots of support to develop their confidence – that's half the battle with learning. Also listen to and praise your younger children when they pretend to read – children need to behave like readers to become readers!

Did you know that children who read a lot instead of watching television, can concentrate for longer?



Get your children writing



People use writing in different ways to get things done and to communicate with others. It is like many crafts – the more you do it, the better you become at it, and so the easier you find it! As parents and caregivers we lead by example when we share the power and purposes of writing in our daily lives with our children. Here are some of the different ways that you can do this.

- ★ Make sure that you have a supply of paper, crayons, pens and pencils at home. Keep them in a place that is easy for your children to reach on their own so that they can draw and write whenever they choose to do so.
- ★ Drawing is often children's first step towards writing. Show an interest in their drawings by making encouraging comments and asking them about their pictures, for example, "That looks like an interesting house to live in. Who lives there?"



- ★ Give your children opportunities to use writing to organise their lives. For example, let them write lists, such as a shopping list, a list of things that they need to take to school the next day, or a guest list for a birthday party. Don't worry about correct spelling. That will come with lots of writing practice. If you can't read something on their lists, ask them to tell you what it says.
- ★ Find opportunities for your children to use writing to communicate with others. Let them: write their names on greeting cards, write thank-you notes, write messages to family members at home and write emails or letters to friends and family who live further away.
- ★ Encourage your children to keep journals in which they can write about anything they like: their feelings, things that happened at home and school, and/or things they want to remember. Respect your children's privacy and only read their journals with their permission.
- ★ Make books by stapling blank sheets of paper together and writing stories with your children. Younger children can draw the pictures. Offer to write the words they tell you, but also encourage them to try to write for themselves. Allow older children to draw and write on their own. Read these books to family members who live with you and others who visit!



Running a reading club



You could start a small reading club at home with your own children and a few of their friends or your neighbour's children. (The children can be any age – from tots to teens.)

Small reading clubs offer lots of wonderful opportunities to explore stories and books with children. All you need is to love stories and to want to share them with children – plus one or two adults who can read, and about five to eight children! Add a bag of books, and some writing and drawing tools (like crayons, pencils, pens and paper) and you are on your way!

In a small club, it is easy to get to know the children well. Share your favourite books and find out each child's personal taste in stories. Spend time reading and talking together about stories.

But how do you know which books to choose? Visit a library with a good children's section and spend time browsing there regularly. Get to know the children's librarian and ask for advice about the books children enjoy. Borrow at least one storybook that you really like, practise reading it and then read it aloud at your club. As you get to know the children well, you'll find yourself looking for stories that deepen their curiosity and interests! You can also choose stories from the "Story and rhyme library" and "Story supplies" sections of the Nalibali website – www.nalibali.org.

And what about writing? Try to make time for writing each time your reading club meets. Children love writing diaries, and it's a great way to grow their writing ability in their home language and/or an additional language. Encourage the children to write (and draw) in their diaries about absolutely anything – their



thoughts, feelings, ideas or what they enjoyed doing on a particular day. (Make sure that they know that what they write is private unless they choose to share it with others.) It's best not to correct their spelling – it's what they are saying that is important. But you can inspire them by writing in your own diary and then sharing your ideas, beautiful handwriting and correct spelling with them.

Whatever you choose to do at your reading club, encourage the children to participate – but don't force them. The aim is to enjoy yourselves as you discover and share stories together.

For more ideas about reading clubs, visit our "How to guides" at www.nalibali.org or "How to" at www.nalibali.mobi. You can also find more information in *Story Power: A guide to reading clubs* which is available in "Story supplies" at www.nalibali.org.

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www.nalibali.mobi

Get storytelling and reading tips, reading club support and stories in 11 South African languages – on your **cellphone**!



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