

Cultivating Readers

Making Reading Active and Fun!

Tips to grow reading skills for ages:

Birth
to
Two

Three
to
Five

Six
to
Eight



Where the Wonders of Learning Never Cease

WONDEROPOLIS®

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Oh! How Readers Grow!

Children's reading skills grow, just like their physical abilities. Your child's motivation to learn is nourished by the everyday experiences she has with you—experiences that include talking, reading, and writing.

Birth to Two

Babies are born ready to learn, and you provide many opportunities for your child's learning! Infants and toddlers learn from everything around them. Responding when your baby makes sounds—crying, babbling, or cooing—provides the foundation for learning to talk, one of the most important skills for a child to develop during the early years. Your child listens and wants to imitate what she hears you say and sees you do. These early experiences will help your child become a successful reader later on.

Three to Five

As children get a little older, their everyday experiences continue to help them learn. From taking a walk and describing things they see to scribbling with crayons and scrap paper, children are building important skills, such as vocabulary and early writing. Preschool children enjoy playing with language—saying rhymes, singing songs, and talking about the books you read together.

Six to Eight

Starting elementary school is an exciting time for children. They look forward to learning to read and having a parent as their special partner in learning. Continue to talk, read, and write together. Encourage your child to talk about what she is learning. What subjects interest her? Talk with her teachers about ways to support her learning at home.

Just like adults, children learn best when they are involved and having fun! Keep the shared learning activities with your child playful and part of your everyday routine. Your child will learn without even realizing it!



The **National Center for Families Learning** inspires and engages families in the pursuit of education and learning together.

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Birth
to
Two

Baby Talk

Children crawl before they walk. They learn language before they read. The loving bond that grows as you share stories, songs, and rhymes with your baby or toddler lasts a lifetime. Even when your baby is too young to know what a book is, he loves to hear your voice reading to him.

Talking sets the stage for language learning. Shower your baby with words. Even though he may not understand the words he's hearing, he is storing up the sounds of language. Soon he will put those sounds and words together and speak them himself. Encourage your child's first words! These experiences lay the foundation for your child's later ability to read.



Talk, Talk, Talk. Talk about what you are doing and what your child is doing throughout the day. For example, describe your everyday activities, like changing your child's diaper, feeding your child, or giving her a bath. "It's bath time! First we need to fill the tub with water. Now, let's check to see if the water is okay, not too hot or too cold. Do we have everything we need? Here's the soap, the shampoo, a towel, and your favorite ducky." Even when your child is too young to answer your questions and talk with you, she is learning from hearing your words.

Words + Words = More Words! As your child begins to speak, encourage him by adding extra words. Children's language grows when they talk with adults who have better speaking skills and know more words. For example, if your child points to his toy and says, "Truck," add words to what he's told you. "Yes, that's your big, red truck!" When he brings you a book and says, "Book," ask him, "You've brought me a book—do you want me to read it to you?"

Sing, Sing, Sing. Sing rhymes like Peek-a-Boo, This Little Piggy, or other songs and chants. Include motions that match the words and sing playfully. Watch your child's responses—reaching for your hand, giggling, or smiling. Singing songs, chants, and rhymes helps your child hear the different sounds of language.

Get In Touch with Letters. Young children like to touch things that feel different. One of the first important words your child will learn is her own name. Cut out the letters in your child's name using sandpaper, bubble wrap, thick cloth, or another material. Paste the letters to a piece of cardboard. Your child will have fun running her fingers over the letters of her name.

What Is This? Make a picture game using photos of things your child sees at home every day. Find pictures in magazines of real objects—a chair, a teddy bear, different foods, etc. Cover the pictures with clear contact paper. Hand your child one of the pictures and ask him if he knows what it is. When he says the word, ask him to find the object in your home and let him lead you to it. This activity increases your child's vocabulary and gives him practice using symbols. Pictures are symbols for real objects. By connecting the symbol or picture to the real object, he is learning that a symbol can represent something real. This is an important building block for reading.

Read, Read, Read. Read often to your baby or toddler. She will enjoy listening to the sound of your voice and will think of reading as your special time together. Young children love to hear the same story read over and over again. That's okay! Hearing the same story helps your child recognize and remember words.

Books

When you and your child snuggle together to share a book, reading becomes an important and happy experience for him. He'll connect the experience of reading to the warm, loving feeling of being with you.

Here are some tips about books to share with your birth to age two child.

Look for books that:

- ✔ Have bold pictures in black or bright colors on a white background.
- ✔ Have no words or only one or two words on each page.
- ✔ Have stiff pages that are easy for young fingers to turn.
- ✔ Are made of cloth or vinyl. These are durable and easy to clean!
- ✔ Have familiar characters, actions or objects. For example, young children love to see pictures of other young children!
- ✔ Have songs, rhymes, and repeating phrases that are fun to hear.
- ✔ Have more words and detailed pictures as your child gets older.

Three
to
Five



Read with Me

From listening to you read, to helping you turn the pages, to filling in predictable words in a story, preschool children want to be at the center of the action. Learning and reading are at the top of the list of things your child wants to do. Playing with language continues to be an important and fun activity during the preschool years.

Keep talking about and sharing everyday experiences together. The more experiences your child has, the more she has to talk about. Walks in your neighborhood, trips to the grocery store, and visits with family and friends are all experiences she can describe to you. The simple things you do together now will have a big impact later!

Learning to write goes hand-in-hand with learning to read. Make sure your child has plenty of materials—crayons, pencils, markers, and paper. Encourage her to draw and write notes to you. Her writing won't look like yours, but she is learning to write by first making scribbles and marks. And just like reading, she'll learn about writing by watching you as you write notes, lists, and letters.

Reading and Sharing. Your preschooler is ready to be your reading partner. As you read aloud with your child, ask questions about what is happening in the story. “What do you think will happen next? Why do you think the monkey wants to wear a hat?” Let your child choose his favorite books to read aloud. If it’s a book you’ve read together before, ask why he picked this book and what he remembers about the story. Talk about the pictures in the book, too—can your child point to the characters or objects that are mentioned in the story?

Word Play. Read stories with rhyme and recite nursery rhymes with your child. Pause at the end of a line and let your child fill in the predictable word. This encourages your child to listen carefully. It also helps her hear the different sounds at the beginning of words: “Jack and Jill went up the hill.” Try changing the first sound of each word to a different sound or letter. For example, “Twinkle, twinkle little star” becomes “Pinkle, pinkle pittle par.”

My Name Is Special! Children are often fascinated by the letters in their own name. Playing word games that are focused on the letters in your child’s name is a great way to keep him interested in learning more about language and the alphabet. Write the letters of your child’s name on a strip of paper and then carefully cut the letters apart. Put the letters into an envelope. Let your child pull out the letters and put them in order. Look for things in your home or neighborhood that start with the first letter of his name. When your child draws a picture, encourage him to “sign” his artwork. It’s okay if his first attempts don’t spell his name exactly. The important part is that he is making the connection between the sound of his name and the action of writing it down.

My ABCs. There are ABC books about lots of different topics. Look for ABC books that match your child’s interests—animals, foods, children’s names, different types of machines. You can also help your child make her very own alphabet book. Help her cut out pictures from magazines and paste them into a scrapbook, one picture for each letter in the alphabet. You could start by looking for one picture for each letter in her name.

Book Time. When you read a book with your child, take time to point out the title and the illustration on the front cover. Read the title out loud, and also read the name of the author. Let your child turn the pages as you read. Follow along with the text, running your finger under the words as you read aloud. Learning how books and print work are important early steps for learning to read.

Books

Children at this age become more interested in letters, print, and books. They can recognize many letters of the alphabet and are beginning to relate letters in print to the sounds they make when spoken—an important skill for learning to read. Many preschool children pretend to read books, telling the story as they move through the pages. By following along as you read with them, preschoolers soon learn many important things about books and print.

Here are some tips about the kinds of books to share with your preschool child. Remember, though, that he may still want to read the books he loved when he was two—and that’s okay! The important part is that he has fun with reading.

Look for books that:

- ✔ Are about ideas or concepts—numbers, colors, letters, shapes.
- ✔ Have simple stories.
- ✔ Have a beat! Encourage your child to read or chant along in rhythm.
- ✔ Are about familiar subjects—family, animals, seasons.
- ✔ Have interesting characters, like young children or animals, who solve problems and get along with each other.
- ✔ Have clear, colorful pictures that match the story.
- ✔ Relate to everyday life.

New Worlds

Throughout the school-age years, children continue to expand their horizons beyond the world of their own home and neighborhood. Reading can help open many new worlds for your child!

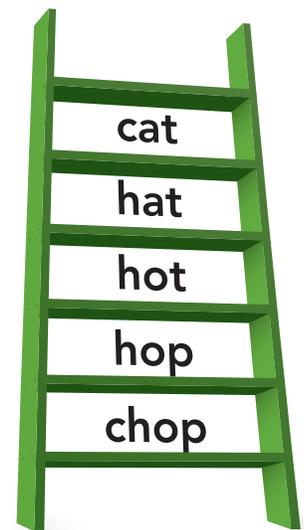
Children enjoy having fun with language. Reading aloud and talking with your child about what you read together is very important. Children need to learn about the sounds of language and how those sounds relate to letters and words. During this time, children are adding new words to their vocabulary. They are also making meaning out of the words they read, making predictions, creating mental pictures, asking questions, and summarizing.

It's also important that your child has a chance to practice his own reading by reading aloud to you. Being able to read smoothly means that your child doesn't have to work so hard to understand what he reads. You can read aloud together, too. This helps your child read more smoothly. Reading the same section several times helps your child practice reading more smoothly, too.

Words, Words, Words.

Words are all around us, and children need to know many words as they begin to read. As you read together, encourage your child to ask about words he doesn't know. Be sure to point out new words you hear on television and words you see in your community. One of the best ways to help your child build a big vocabulary is to talk with him. Ask about his day at school, his friends, and his favorite topics. Take the information he shares and help him expand on his words. "You played soccer? Tell me about the game." Tell him about your day, too! The more words your child hears, the more words he will learn and be able to read.

Making words is another great way to build vocabulary. Use magnetic letters or tile letters to create words within a word family. For example, using the -at family, your child may build *cat*, *hat*, *mat*, and *flat*. You can also create word ladders, which is a chain of words that have one letter different at each next step. You might change the beginning, ending, or middle of the word.



Word Ladder Example

Guess the Word. It's important for your child to be able to hear the different sounds of language. Playing games that focus on the letter sounds, word families, and vowel patterns helps your child be able to hear the different sounds of language. Try playing a guessing game in which you give clues to the word on which you want to focus. Give clues that highlight beginning sounds, word families, or vowel patterns. You could give clues about the number of letters in the word, the number of syllables, the beginning sound, a word that rhymes, or give a clue about the meaning. The weekly spelling or vocabulary list would be a good list to use for this game. When you start a new word, challenge your child to get the word in no more than five clues. Alternate between saying a guess aloud and writing the word.

Turn Friends into Pen Pals. Together, write a letter to a friend or family member. Talk about what you might say or which fond memories you may share with the recipient. In addition to being a great deal of fun, writing a letter to someone helps your child practice important writing and storytelling skills. When your child tries to spell words as she writes, she is thinking about the relationships between sounds and letters. Children need lots of practice as they learn to write. As your child spells words, she breaks them into parts and connects letters to the sounds of the word parts. She may try this on her own or she may ask you to spell the words for her. Her spelling knowledge will grow as she reads and writes more. Friends and family will love getting a letter!

Read, Listen, Read. Take turns reading aloud with your child. Have your child read part of a story, and then you read the next part. Taking turns while you read is fun for both you and your child. It's also important for your child to become a fluent reader so he can read smoothly, without pausing. Listening to you read will help him hear how to read with expression. Listening to him read helps him practice reading smoothly and with expression. Pick stories that give you an opportunity to change your voice—with parts you can read loudly, in a whisper, with a deep voice, or a squeaky voice. Encourage your child to use his voice to show the feelings in the story or act out the story with your family. Most of all, have fun!

Books

Keep reading fun by finding things to read that are interesting to children—comic books, cookbooks, books about subjects they are interested in. Expose your child to different kinds of reading materials such as stories, informational materials, and poetry. Visit the library and book store. Read the newspaper together and search the Internet.

Here are some tips about the kinds of books to share with your school-age child. Remember that she may still enjoy reading favorite books from her earlier years, and that's okay. Encourage her also to read new books that are challenging, but not frustrating.

Look for books that:

- ✓ Have clear, easy-to-read print. As your child's reading ability grows, look for books with more challenging text.
- ✓ Are about interesting topics, places, events, and people.
- ✓ Play with sounds and language, like books that rhyme or include chants and songs. Read poetry together, too.
- ✓ Present a realistic and accurate picture of the world.
- ✓ Are nonfiction, like books about science, history, or real people.
- ✓ Have interesting pictures or artwork.



Choosing a Book to Read Five Finger Rule

1. Choose a book!
2. Open the book to any page and begin reading.
3. Put one finger up for each word you don't know.

Too Easy



0-1 Fingers

Just Right



2-3 Fingers

Too Hard



4-5 Fingers

Boost Your Word Power:

A Parent's Glossary of Reading Skills

As your child's reading skills grow and when she enters school, you will probably hear many different reading terms. Below are words and phrases that your child's teacher may use or that you may read about in information sent home from school.

Alphabet Knowledge. It's important that children learn the names of the letters of the alphabet and, ultimately, the sounds that the letters represent. As children begin to make the connection between letters and sounds, they also begin to see that letters work together to form words—such as their own name!

Fluency. Being able to read accurately, quickly, and with proper expression—fluently—means children can focus on the meaning of the words they are reading. They do not have to work so hard to figure out how to say the words. Building fluency helps children understand what they read.

Oral Language. Oral language refers to speaking and listening, but there's more to it than that! Children need oral language skills to express their needs and ideas (speaking) and to understand what others say (listening). In other words, oral language is an important building block for nearly all other communication, including reading and writing.

Phonemic Awareness. Children who know that spoken sounds work together to form words are taking early steps in becoming successful readers. Children who have fun with spoken sounds—sort words by their first sound, say the first or last sound in a word, blend the separate sounds in a word, and separate words into their parts—learn that words are made of sounds and that changing the sounds changes the words.

Phonics. Children hear the sounds of oral language and begin to connect those sounds to the letters of written language. When children understand this relationship between sounds and letters, they are able to recognize familiar words when they are written. They also can figure out how to pronounce and read new written words.

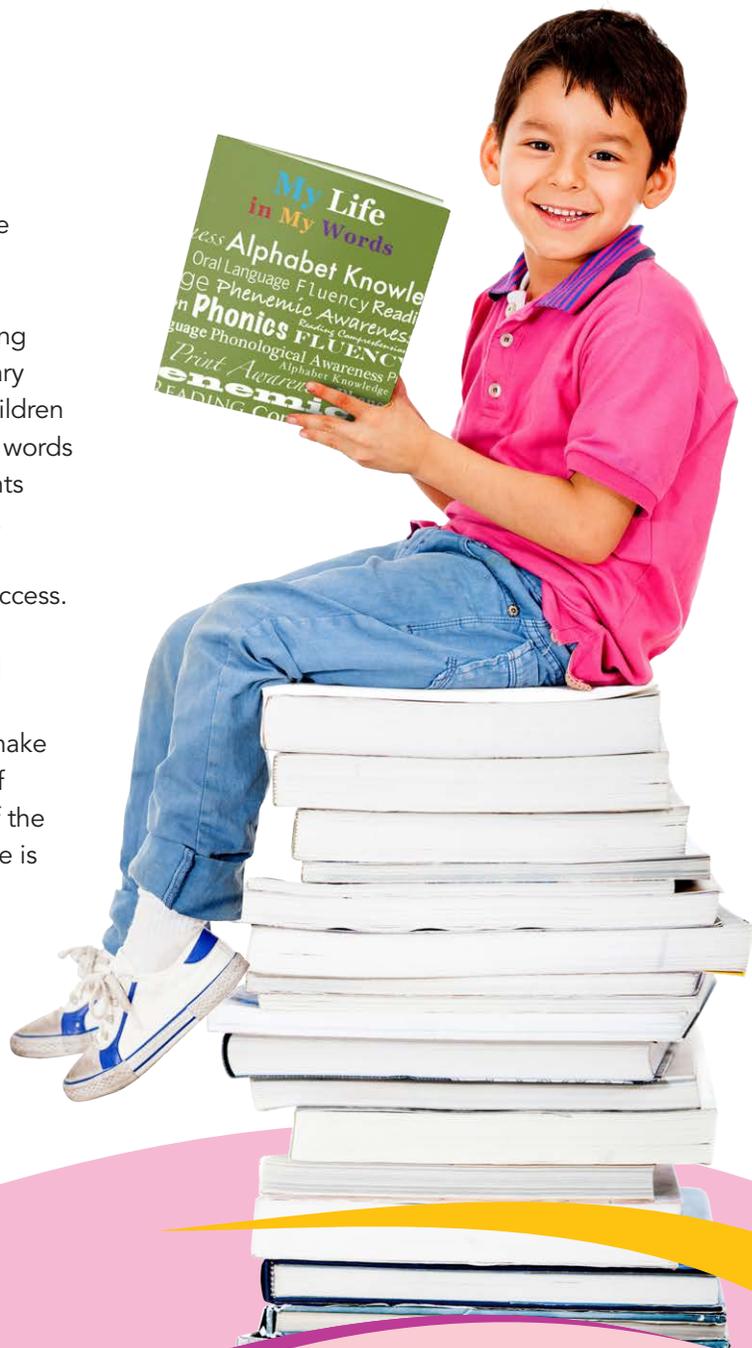
Phonological Awareness. Children need to be able to hear and play with the separate sounds within spoken words as they begin to learn to read. As they recognize the sounds within words—for example, beginning sounds and ending sounds—they learn that words are made up of smaller sounds. They also learn that by changing these sounds, they can create new words.

Print Awareness. Children need to make connections between the words they hear and the words they see in print. As children begin to explore all types of printed materials (like books, magazines, and signs), they begin to see that pictures and written words represent real things. Children also learn how print works, including the direction in which words are read.

Reading Comprehension. Making meaning of written words is necessary for understanding what we read. Children can use various strategies to help them understand what they read. For example, they can use what they already know (background knowledge) to make sense of what they read, use pictures and captions, make predictions, create mental pictures, ask questions, and summarize.

Vocabulary. We need words to be able to communicate—listen, speak, read, and write. The more words children know and understand, the better they are at expressing their own thoughts. Knowing lots of words also helps children’s reading comprehension. Children with a limited vocabulary have difficulty understanding what they read. Children learn words in two ways—by hearing and seeing words as they listen, talk, and read and by having parents and teachers teach them the meanings of words.

Writing. Early writing is connected to reading success. Scribbling, drawing, and pretending to write are beginning steps. Children also may use invented spelling—getting some but not all of the letters correct or leaving out letters—as they begin to make the important connection between the sounds of language and the letters of the alphabet. One of the first words children will want to know how to write is their own name.



This calendar provides suggestions for fun activities to do with your child throughout the year. Sharing language and literacy experiences with your child helps support learning and school success.

JANUARY

New Year's Day: Make a vocabulary resolution—you and your child will learn a new word each week for the entire year. Keep a list of all the new words you learn together.

National Soup Month: Serve alphabet soup. See who can be the first to spell a word using the letters in the soup. Keep making more words!

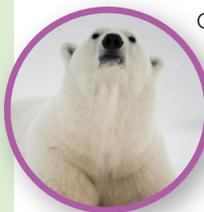
National Handwriting Day (January 23): Have your child practice her handwriting by writing a note to a family member (aunt or uncle, grandparent, cousin). Write about something that happened during the winter holidays, or share something about school.



FEBRUARY

American Heart Month: Help your child identify three fitness activities the whole family can follow for maintaining a healthy heart. Then, take a walk together.

Groundhog Day (February 2): Predict whether or not the groundhog will see his shadow. If the groundhog does see his shadow, winter is extended for six more weeks. Check the news to see if you were right!
(Together, spell Punxsutawney—the hometown of the “official” groundhog.)



Polar Bear Day (February 27): Visit wonderopolis.org to learn about polar bears—where they live, what they eat and what they look like (height, weight, etc.).

MARCH

Women's History Month: Do you know a famous female author, artist, or explorer? Visit the library to learn about some awesome women. Share what you learned with your family.

National Noodle Month: What's your favorite type of pasta? Plan a noodle party together and let your child design the invitations. What information needs to be included?

First Day of Spring (March 20): Help your child make a list of nature's first signs of spring to look for, such as birds returning after the winter, flowers starting to sprout, trees budding. Then take a walk together and have your child check off all the things on the list that you see.

APRIL

National Poetry Month: Check out a book of children's poetry from the library. Read a poem with your child each day of the month.

Read a Road Map Day (April 5): Using a map of your state, ask your child to locate various locations such as the state capital, special landmarks, bordering states, and national or state forests or parks. Can he find his city or town?

World Health Day (April 7): Help your child write a “Top Ten List” of things to do to be healthy. Then have her share it with the whole family.

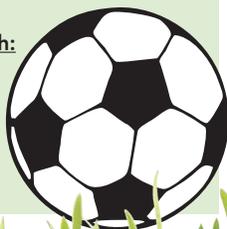


MAY

Mother Goose Day (May 1): Take turns reciting all the Mother Goose rhymes you can remember. Then read a Mother Goose book of rhymes to find more.

Older Americans Month: Older adults have great experiences to share. Ask your child to think of three or four questions to ask an older adult. Have him schedule an interview with that person to find out the answers.

National Physical Fitness and Sports Month: Create a schedule of physical activities you and your child can do together during the month. For example, ride bikes, play catch, jump rope, shoot baskets, and take a walk.



JUNE

Zoo Month: Is there a zoo in your community? If so, plan a family visit. Help your child make a list of the animals she hopes to see. If you can't visit a zoo, check out some of the amazing animals featured on wonderopolis.org

National Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Month: Help your child name a fruit or vegetable for each letter of the alphabet. Eat as many different ones as you can during the month. Try some new ones, too!

U.S. Flag Day (June 14): Why are there 13 stripes on the U.S. flag? How many stars are there? What does each color represent? How should the flag be displayed? Learn these facts and more by playing the fun activity “Find the Flags” at familieslearning.org/interactive_tools/find_the_flag.

JULY

National Picnic Month: Ask your child to help you plan a picnic. Begin by using the newspaper or a weather app on your phone to look for a day that promises to be sunny and clear. Then plan where you will go, what you will eat, and what games to play.

National Recreation Month: Help your child research the many interesting activities available in your area — museums, zoo, libraries, parks, athletic events, swimming pools. Pick one that works best for your family and have some fun!

Independence Day (July 4): Talk about what “independence” means and why the United States celebrates it. Have your child help search the newspaper for a fun Fourth of July activity your family can attend.

AUGUST

Friendship Day (First Sunday in August): Help your child write a letter to a friend about the qualities she admires. Together, hand-deliver the letter to her friend.

International Left-Handers’ Day (August 13): Have an “opposites day!” If your child is right-handed, today he will use his left hand; if left-handed, he will use his right hand. Ask him at the end of the day what tasks were most difficult.

Potato Day (August 19): Ask your child to think of different ways to serve potatoes and together plan five meals using potatoes in five different ways. Don’t forget to include sweet potatoes.



SEPTEMBER

Library Card Sign-up Month: If your child doesn’t have a library card, go to the library this month and get one. If she already has a library card, help her select a safe place to keep it between visits.

Labor Day: Why is it called Labor Day, but no one goes to work? Visit wonderopolis.org to find out all about Labor Day.

National Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15): Explore the Hispanic culture through vivid illustrations and text. Visit nea.org/grants/29504.htm and choose something great to read from their bilingual book list!



OCTOBER

Día de la Raza (October 12): Speak with your child about the significance of civil rights and why they are important. For more information, check out Wonder #410: What Is a Civil Right? at wonderopolis.org.

National Popcorn Popping Month: Encourage your child to list five reasons she likes popcorn. Help her write a paragraph using the reasons. Indent, capitalize, and punctuate where appropriate. Pop some corn and make up “corny” stories together!

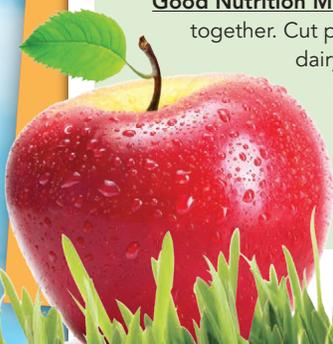
Computer Learning Month: Help your child create a list of words that have to do with computers. Help him go online to look them up.

NOVEMBER

National Family Literacy Month: November is the month to remember the importance of families learning together. Celebrate by reading together the Wonder of the Day® at wonderopolis.org.

Latin American Month: Encourage your child to look for newspaper articles about Latin American countries. Find the countries on a map and locate their capitals, too.

Good Nutrition Month: Create a food portion plate together. Cut pictures of grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, meats, and beans out of magazines. Help your child place them in the correct area and discuss good nutrition.



DECEMBER

Read a New Book Month: At the library, help your child choose a new book to read. Talk about the books she likes to read—about a special topic or a particular type of book, by a favorite author or about a special character. Hurry home and read it together.

National Cookie Day (December 4): Make cookies with your child. Use the recipe to talk about sequence: “First we have to preheat the oven. Next, we will mix the ingredients.” Enjoy the results.



Holiday Celebrations: Visit the library or use the Internet with your child to find information about December holiday celebrations such as Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa. Ask your child to write an interesting fact about each to share with your family.