

LEARNING TO READ BY PLAYING WITH BLOCKS

Little children have played with blocks all over the world for a long time. Their blocks were often the lumber scraps and pieces of adobe bricks left over from their parents' building projects. Today's kids are more likely to play with wooden or plastic blocks made just for them. Did you know *playing with blocks helps children learn to read*? Here's how:

When your child plays with blocks, she's paying attention to how things look, how one block is related to another in size, shape and color and how the blocks are *related to one another spatially*. Sometimes she organizes the block in *even* piles, or stacks them in *even* towers or columns; sometimes *uneven*. Sometimes she'll line up the blocks in a pattern of *alternating* colors. Other times she lines up all the blue blocks first, then all the red. She looks for *how things are alike* and *how they are different*. And *every bit of this play is good practice for learning to read*.

When children fool with their blocks, arranging them first in one way and then in another, they're giving their brain good practice in *recognizing how things are related to one another spatially*. This will help them later when they have to recognize letters and their patterns in words.

Think about the small letters **b d p g q**. Basically they are just sticks and circles and what makes them different from each other is simply which side of the stick their circle is on and whether their stick goes up or down. Every time your child plays with reorganizing the way his blocks are arranged, he's practicing paying attention to how things are related to one another in spatially.

Think, too, about words like **t o p** and **p o t** or **w a s** and **s a w**. Words like these have exactly the same letters. The letters are just arranged differently. *Which word* the letters make depends on *where* you start to read them. Older children who forget, or never knew, that *we begin to read from the left side and move right*, will confuse words like these.

Little children who play with blocks, making patterns that sometimes start on the left side and sometimes on the right are getting great practice in this skill of looking for patterns and where they begin and how they can be different.

There's another way playing with blocks can help your child with reading skills. If you comment on her play, describe what you see and talk about what she's doing, you'll give her the words she needs to talk about it herself. Maybe she built a free-way *ramp* or a very tall *column*. Maybe her towers are *even*; maybe they're *uneven in height*. When you use words like these, you're teaching them, too. They'll become part of your child's own vocabulary. Because she knows what they mean, she might be more like to be able to read them when she sees them written. *And all this came through playing with blocks!*