

LEARNING TO READ BY PLAYING MAKE-BELIEVE

Isn't it fun when your young child picks up the garden hose and pretends she's a firefighter or when she offers you some yummy mud pie and make-believe coffee from the sandbox? ***When children begin to pretend that one thing is another, we say they are beginning to use symbols.*** That means they're able to have one thing stand for, or ***symbolize***, another. Playing make-believe is a terrific way for very young children to develop their ability to use symbols. ***And it's also a terrific foundation for learning to read!***

Some people call this kind of play "***dramatic play***," because it's as if young children are creating little dramas they then act out. One morning they pretend they are the parent and you're the little child; then, they pretend they're an animal or a robot or a doctor. You could ***enrich your youngster's pretend play by supplying some simple props*** to help make the play more fun—like measuring spoons and a muffin pan for making mud pies or a garden hose and boots for the make-believe firefighter.

Each time your child creates a little drama like this, you have the chance to help him develop skills that will help him later when he learns to read. If your child has begun to talk, ***let him tell you about his play in his own words. And, then, just write down what he says.*** If he's not talking yet, you can write simple sentences you make up yourself about his play. (Use a marker and print the words carefully, using a dark marker, so they'll be easier for your young child to see. Even though he can't read yet, he'll probably be very interested in seeing what these words look like in print.) If you can take pictures, too, while he's playing, that will be even better.

Then you can put the pages with your child's words (or your own) about her make-believe play together to make a book about what she was pretending. And if you have photos, you can use those to illustrate her story. Or, you could see if she would like to draw or paint some pictures for her book. You know this will be ***a very special storybook because it came from your child's play and is written in her own words.***

These will be books that you'll probably save forever and, for certain, they'll be favorites as your child first ***pretends*** to read them to you and then, later, ***really*** reads them--as a true reader who first learned to love storybooks just from playing make-believe.

What a great gift to give your child—the love of making up stories!