

# Exploring Books *with* Grandchildren

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**R**eading is a way to share human experiences. Intergenerational bonds can be built and strengthened by relating stories to personal experience. Reading also can help develop reading, writing, and speaking skills. Ideally, books match one's interests, motivation, and reading ability. Here are some considerations when exploring and choosing books for and with your grandchildren.

## **General principles**

Children who are read to become readers. Through books, children—and adults—are exposed to new sounds, words, and ideas.

Books are a vehicle for developing imagination. Children's thoughts and curiosity are stimulated by each new story they hear, tell, or read.

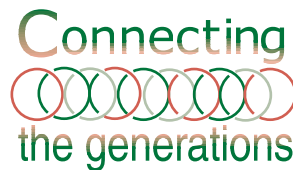
People of all ages enjoy hearing stories. A grandparent–grandchild reading or story time can be a memorable shared activity.

Books are a way to learn about people in your family: their interests, their values, their cultural heritage, the time during which they lived. As a way of getting to know each other better, you and your grandchild might read the same book and then share your thoughts and reactions.

## **Reading to others**

Reading to an audience, even an audience of one, takes practice. Reading the book through beforehand helps you know the book well enough to read it to others.

Speak slowly and clearly. Use expression. In reading a children's book, for example, you might use one voice for a child and another voice for a dog. Talk about the story and laugh together.



Especially when reading to young children, be willing to adapt, improvise, and allow interruptions. It's okay, for example, to shorten a lengthy passage to suit your audience.

Because young children may be more interested in the pictures than the story, take time to look at the pictures. Let children follow the story however they want to. Notice when they are tired or bored. Sometimes a different activity would be better than reading.

Young children like to have the same story read to them over and over again. They see or hear something new whether you're reading it for the first or the fiftieth time.

If you live at a distance from your grandchild, tape yourself reading a book and mail the tape and the book to your grandchild.

## **Choosing books as gifts**

Books are a lasting gift because they can be read again and again. Think about what the book teaches. For example, does it portray the expression of anger, conflict, fear, or other strong emotions in an appropriate way? Does it sensitively give information about people who are different from you and from others in your family?

In choosing books, consider what your grandchild likes and the child's age and stage of development. Talk to your grandchildren about what they are reading. Add to your grandchildren's collection of books by a favorite author. Choose books that are interesting, original, entertaining, clever, engaging. Choose picture books with illustrations that delight you. Beautiful books can make a lasting impression.

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As an alternative, consider a magazine subscription for your grandchild. *National Geographic World*, *Ranger Rick*, and *Zillions* are just three examples. A magazine subscription is a great gift because new issues arrive throughout the year.

For help in selecting books or magazines, ask a librarian or an experienced bookstore employee.

### **For infants and young children**

For infants, consider the book's sturdiness as well as the story and pictures. Cloth, cardboard, and plastic books will hold up well to a baby's rough handling.

Books with bold colors, big pictures, and few words are ideal for infants and preschoolers. Photographs are especially appealing.

You and your grandchild can use picture books with no words to make up stories again and again.

Choose books with silly sounds, that encourage pointing and naming, or that appeal to the senses.

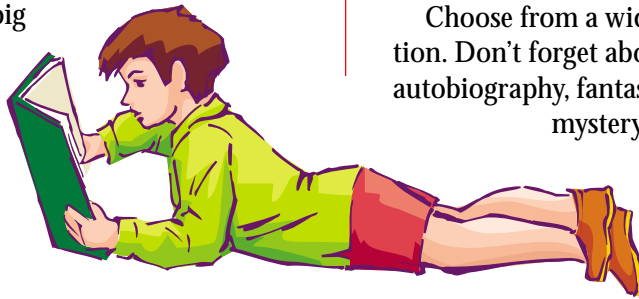
Consider the story's rhythm. Babies and young children love books with rhymes or word plays.

Books that teach the alphabet, numbers, shapes, and animal names are ideal for young children.

Consider making an infant's book, using only large objects that don't present choking hazards. Choose heavy material, and cut the edge with pinking shears. Sew a seam on the left side to connect the pages. Using scraps of material or fabric with different textures, cut out and sew to the pages large, familiar objects—animals, cars, flowers, buildings. Label the objects with indelible markers.

Handmade books can help a slightly older child practice fine motor skills, naming, and counting. Sew on very large buttons—be aware of choking hazards—and cut button holes to match on the opposite page. On another page, sew a zipper. Add pages of fabric shapes in different colors for the child to identify and count.

Make a book of photos of everyday activities with you, you and your grandchild, or your family members as characters. Put these photos in an inexpensive photo album with magnetic pages. Add a storyline and mail the book to your grandchild.



### **For the beginning reader**

Books for early readers should be short, with simple vocabulary and a slightly enlarged type. The story should be uncomplicated and have a small cast of characters.

Choose books that the child soon will be able to read on his or her own.

Children listen at a higher level of vocabulary than they can read at that time. Expose grandchildren to books that talk “up,” that have some words you don't think they can understand right now.

### **For more experienced readers**

Choose from a wide range of fiction and nonfiction. Don't forget about adventure, biography and autobiography, fantasy, history and historical fiction, mystery, poetry, science and science fiction, and short stories.

### **For young adults**

The reading interest and skills of young adults vary considerably. Consider quality and variety, as you would in choosing a book for yourself. You may decide that an adult book is appropriate.

Look for books that write sensitively and with depth about the issues adolescents and young adults confront in their daily lives.

Pay attention to what your grandchildren know and their interests.

If you live far away from your grandchildren, consider giving gift certificates. If you live nearby or are visiting, take your grandchildren to a book store to select a book or two. For more resources, see:

The Children's Literature Web Guide, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

[www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/index.html](http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/index.html)

Trelease, Jim. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, 4th ed.

1995. New York: Penguin Books.

Chinaberry Book Service, 2780 Via Orange Way, Suite B, Spring Valley, CA 91978. Tel. 800-776-2242. Internet [www.chinaberry.com](http://www.chinaberry.com)

Your local library will provide help in selecting books, identifying award-winning books, and offering story times.

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