Reading aloud, singing, doing fingerplays and engaging young children in conversation are all ways that parents and caregivers lay the foundation for young children to become successful readers and writers. The following activities were created to promote literacy with young children through hands-on, real-life experiences that will stimulate learning.

Have fun and “Grow a Reader!”

**Car Wash**

Gather bicycles, tricycles, big wheels and wagons as well as buckets, sponges, and old rags. Set up a “car wash” where the children can wash the vehicles using a garden hose or buckets of water. Additional props might include a car wash sign, tickets to use as claim checks, and a cash register where customers can pay for their car wash.

**Red Light, Green Light**

Explain the rules of the game “Red Light, Green Light” to the children. One person stands at one end of an outside space or room, and the rest of the children stand at the other end. The distance will depend on the space that you have as well as the ages of the children. The lone person acts as the traffic light and has a green circle for a green light or a red circle for a red light. When the green light is held up, the rest of the children begin to run toward that lone person. When the red light is shown, the children must stop. Repeat the process until all the children reach the traffic light.

*Variation: The traffic light person can call out “Red Light” or “Green Light” instead of holding up a circle.*
Car Parts

Take a field trip in your own driveway! Children will enjoy learning about your car or truck. Help them name different parts of the vehicle: bumper, headlights, axle, gear shift, gas tank, windshield and windshield wipers, rearview mirror, hood, bed (of a truck), license plate, steering wheel, etc. Lift each child one by one onto the driver’s seat so they can honk the horn and pretend to drive.

Safety Alert:

- Make sure there is no possibility of the vehicle moving.
- Remove keys and set parking brake.
- Remind children of the importance of not playing near cars or in parking lots.

Windshield Wiper

*An action rhyme*

I’m a windshield wiper
(bend arms at elbow with fingers pointing up)

This is how I go
(move arms to left and right)

Back and forth, back and forth
(continue back and forth motion)

In the rain and snow.
(Continue back and forth motion)
Making Tracks

Materials:
Toy vehicles with a variety of tire treads
Play dough (see recipe below)
Rolling pins

Children can roll out pieces of play dough and use each vehicle to make tracks in the dough.

After numerous tracks have been made, invite children to match the vehicles with the tracks that they see in the dough.

Playdough Recipe*

(Enough for 3 children. Recipe can be doubled)

Ingredients:
2 cups flour  ¼ cup salt
2 T cooking oil  4 t cream of tartar
2 cups water  Food coloring

Directions:
1. Put food coloring in water.
2. Combine all ingredients and cook over medium heat.
3. Stir constantly until ball forms.
4. Remove from heat.
5. Knead ball of dough until smooth.

*all cooking projects require adult supervision.
At the Wheel

- Make a steering wheel for each child out of a paper plate by cutting out the center.
- Discuss the need for a driver's license with the children. Show them a real license and point out that the information on the license describes the person.
- Give each child an index card (or small piece of tag board) and let each child make his/her own license.
- With their licenses in their pockets, the children can use the paper plate steering wheels to pretend to drive cars.

Wheels on the Bus

Gather props such as a cap for the bus driver, pretend money, a jar for the money, newspaper, baby dolls, etc.

Arrange chairs in rows of two to represent the seats on a bus. While sitting on the bus, encourage the children to act out the song while singing “The Wheels on the Bus.”

Looking Through the Window

You will need a window or an outside play area that has a safe, clear view of a street for this activity. Children can watch out the window and record the vehicles that go by. You can make a chart to record their sightings either by type or by color. Children could also predict what type or color of vehicle will come by next.
GORP to Go!
(Good Old Raisins and Peanuts)

From The Cooking Book by Laura J. Colker

1 cup raisins
1 cup peanuts' (or other nuts)
½ cup sunflower seeds
½ cup pumpkin seeds
1 cup carob chips
1 cup shredded coconut

Help children add all ingredients to a bowl and then mix with a spoon.
Pour into resealable plastic bags … and go!

* For children with peanut allergies, omit peanuts.

“Driver, Driver Where’s Your Key?”

Children sit in a circle with one child in the center. The child in the center closes her/his eyes (or you can blindfold the child).

- Give one of the children in the circle a key.
- All children hide their hands behind their backs as if they are the one with the key.
- The child in the center opens his/her eyes.
- The children in the circle call out “Driver, driver, where’s your key?”
- The child in the center gets three guesses to find out who has the key. If after three guesses the child hasn’t guessed who has the key, the child with the key shows it to the child in the center.
- The child with the key goes to the center of the circle to be the guesser, and the guesser finds a place in the circle. Repeat until everyone gets to be the guesser.
Bring books to life with these simple ideas that highlight early literacy skills.

**Sheep in a Jeep** by Nancy Shaw

**Presentation Notes:** Things get messy when the sheep go out for a joy ride and end up in a heap! Although the text is short and simple, there is a lot more happening in the illustrations. Ask children to help describe the action and make predictions about what will come next. Prompt children to give the meaning of unfamiliar words by looking at the pictures too. Read aloud multiple times and leave off rhyming words for the children to fill in and join the fun.

**Skills Featured:** Narrative, Vocabulary, Phonological Awareness

**Little Blue Truck** by Alice Schertle

**Presentation Notes:** A dump truck learns a valuable lesson about friendship from a little blue truck in this rhyming story full of sounds. Point to the blue text and have children join in saying “beep!” To emphasize the rhythm, have children slap their thighs or clap their hands to the beat as you read. After the story, talk about what it means to be a friend and why they think no one wanted to help the dump truck.

**Skills Featured:** Print Awareness, Print Motivation, Phonological Awareness

**Truck Stuck** by Sallie Wolf

**Presentation Notes:** A stuck truck causes a miserable traffic jam, but it turns out to be very profitable for two children with a lemonade stand nearby. Be sure to show the very first page of the children creating their lemonade business. Have children repeat new vocabulary and offer definitions where necessary. Take your time reading and leave plenty of time for the children to look at the pictures. Ask open ended questions so they can fill in the rest of the story with their ideas.

**Skills Featured:** Narrative, Vocabulary

**Seals on the Bus** by Lenny Hort

**Presentation Notes:** When a family sets out to take an ordinary bus ride, they get quite a surprise! Have children join in on the fun by making the appropriate animal noises as you sing the familiar tune. Children can guess what each animal will do before it boards the bus and where they think the bus might be going.

**Skills:** Print Motivation, Phonological Awareness, Narrative
**Wheels on the Bus** by Maryann Kovalski

**Presentation Notes:** In this clever adaptation, singing “The Wheels on the Bus” while waiting for the bus is a perfect way to pass the time for two girls and their grandma. The classic tune becomes part of the story and leads to the surprise ending. Invite children to join in singing and creating actions for each verse. After reading, talk about other verses that could be included or how the song might change if they sang about the wheels on the taxi.

**Skills Featured:** Print Motivation, Phonological Awareness, Narrative

**Cars: Rushing! Honking! Zooming!** by Patricia Hubbell

**Presentation Notes:** From race cars to station wagons, cars get us where we need to go. The rhyming text introduces plenty of rich vocabulary including both the types of vehicles and their actions. Be sure to call attention to the printed text on pages that must be turned vertically to be read and understood. Follow up by observing cars and asking children to describe what they see.

**Skills Featured:** Print Awareness, Vocabulary

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### More Great Books!

- **Alphabeep: A Zipping, Zooming ABC** by Debora Pearson
- **Wheels on a Bus** by Paul O. Zelinsky
- **Rattletrap Car** by Phyllis Root
- **Truck Driver Tom** by Monica Wellington
- **School Bus** by Donald Crews
- **Vroom, Chugga, Vroom-vroom** by Anne Miranda
- **Duck on a Bike** by David Shannon