



## *Emergent Literacy: Fun with Language*

10 Activities to Promote a Love of the Sound  
and Feel of Words

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Speaking, along with listening, reading, and writing, comprise the language arts, or emergent literacy. Although it is the component that seems to receive the least attention, Gay Su Pinnell, an expert in early childhood literacy, has written that oral language is “the foundation of literacy learning.”

It is true that children typically begin speaking – without a lot of help from us – when they’re toddlers. But unless they have many opportunities to experience language and its rhythms, volumes, tempos, and textures in a variety of ways, they may never come to love the sound of language.

When children speak, chant, and sing, they practice enunciating or pronouncing words, some familiar and some not so familiar. Singing songs they love broadens their vocabulary and acquaints them with literacy concepts such as rhyming. Also, as children are exposed to the cadence of language and to physical expressions of that cadence, they become able to internalize the rhythm of words when reading and writing.

# Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

Discuss the meaning of the words *twinkle* and *diamond* with the children and point out the rhyming words in the song (*star* and *are*, *high* and *sky*). Then sing this longtime favorite with them:

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are!  
Up above the world so high,  
Like a diamond in the sky.  
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are!*

Invite the children to create actions to go with the lyrics!



# Naming Body Parts

Say the following sentences and point to the appropriate body part(s). Have the children complete the sentences by calling out their answers.

- I see with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I hear with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I smell with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I walk with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I talk with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I taste with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I touch with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I shrug with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I think with my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I shampoo my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I brush my \_\_\_\_\_.
- I blink my \_\_\_\_\_.

Once your child is succeeding at this activity, eliminate the pointing to make it a listening activity.

# Echo



Recite the following nursery rhyme, breaking it into small pieces and clapping one clap per syllable as you say the words.

*May had a little lamb,  
Little lamb, Little lamb.  
Mary had a little lamb,  
Its fleece was white as snow.*

Pause after each word or set of words so the children can repeat what you did. For example, clap twice as you say “Ma-ry” and invite the children to mimic you. Clap twice again as you say “had a,” which the children repeat. Continue this pattern throughout the nursery rhyme.

# A Time for Rhyme



Make up a list of rhyming words in advance. Then say one of those words to the children; for example, you might say *bat*. Invite the children to repeat the word and to perform an action to depict it. (Keep in mind that one child might pretend to swing a bat, while another might flap her wings like the other kind of bat.)

Continue this process with other words that rhyme with the first word you've used. Possibilities here include *cat*, *hat*, *mat*, *rat*, and *sat*.

# A Voice for Every Occasion



Invite the children to each say their whole name out loud. Next, ask them to whisper their name, followed by shouting their name. Finally, invite them to sing their name.

Once the children are familiar with this game, tell them that for this activity, walking is the movement that goes along with the speaking voice. Brainstorm with them about what movements might go with each of the other three voices. For example, they might determine that tiptoeing goes with whispering, stomping goes with shouting, and dancing goes with singing. Next, call out one of the types of voices and invite the children to say their name in that voice while doing the corresponding movement.

# Body Sounds



Talk to the children about the sounds of a cough, sneeze, yawn, hiccup, giggle, and snore.

Then say the words, one at a time, and invite them to say it as well and then *act out* the selected word.



# Just Like It Sounds

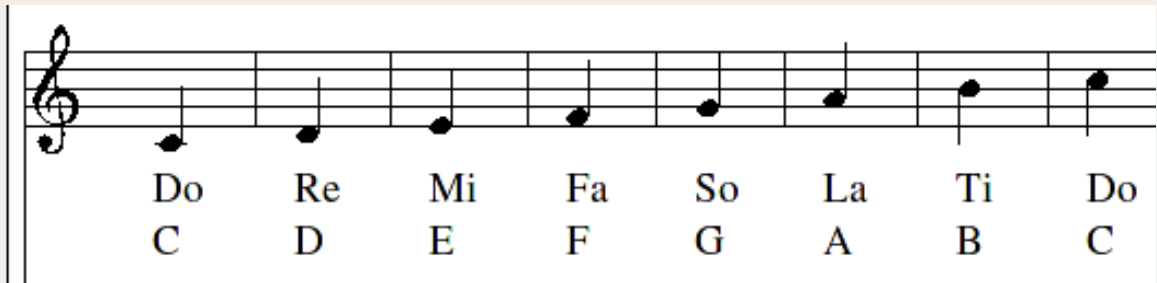
The term used to describe words that sound like what they mean is onomatopoeia, and that's what this activity explores.

Present the following words to the children, one at a time, inviting them to say the word as they do the action.

- boom
- plop
- wobble
- swish
- whoops
- splash
- quack
- hop
- drip
- squeak



# Do-Re-Mi



The notes of the musical scale (do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do) may seem to be about music only, but singing these notes helps children learn to enunciate as it also familiarizes them with vowels.

Invite the children to echo what you sing as clearly as they can, as you sing one note at a time.

Once the children know the scale well and can sing it along with you, ask them to place their hands in their lap and to raise them a little higher with each note.

# B-I-N-G-O

It isn't until children can 'decode' letters (understand that letters represent something) and spell that they can read and write successfully. This fun, familiar song can help toward that goal.

Sing the song with the children.

*There was a farmer had a dog,  
And Bingo was his name-o.  
B-I-N-G-O,  
B-I-N-G-O,  
B-I-N-G-O,  
And Bingo was his name-o.*

For the next round, substitute a clap for the letter B. Continue, substituting one more clap for one more letter with each repeat, until all the letters have been replaced by claps.

# Old MacDonald



Sing this old favorite with the children:

*Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O  
And on that farm he had a [cow], E-I-E-I-O  
With a [moo-moo] here, and a [moo-moo]  
there*

*Here a [moo], there a [moo]  
Everywhere a [moo-moo].*

*Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O.*

Substitute a new animal with a familiar sound with each succeeding verse and have the children also act out the movements the animal might make!

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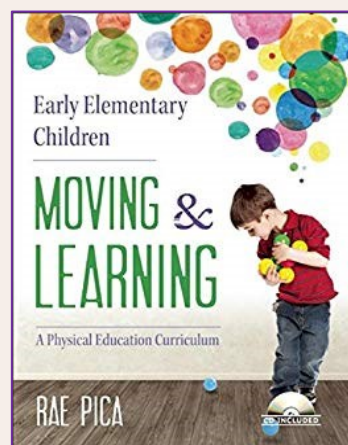
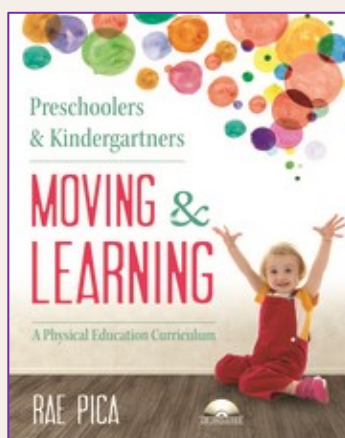
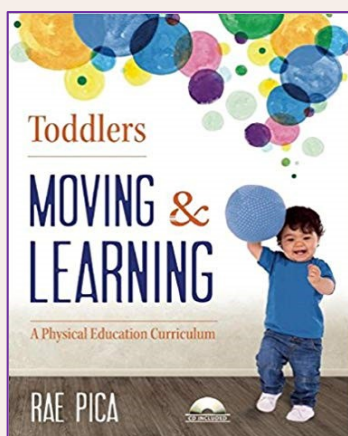
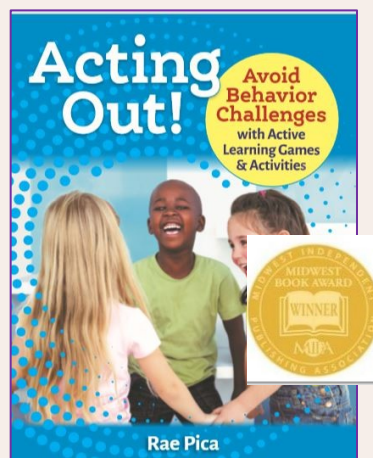
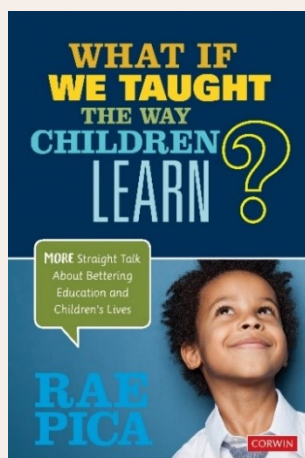
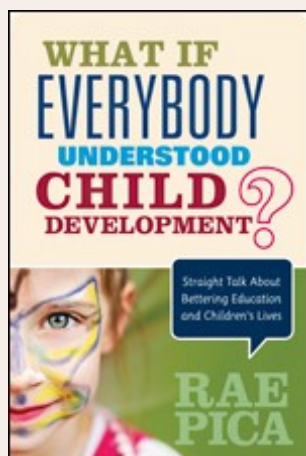
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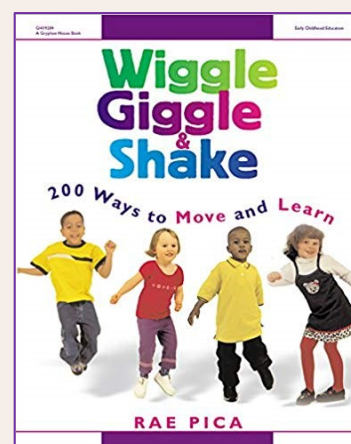
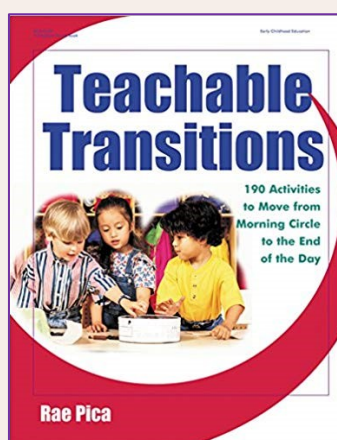
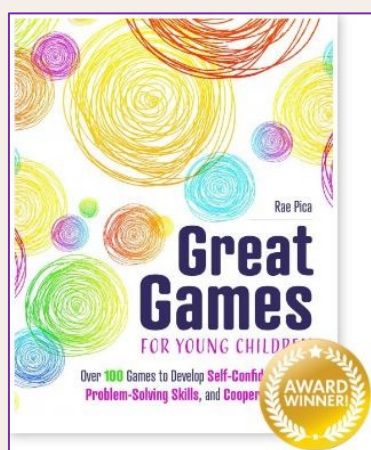
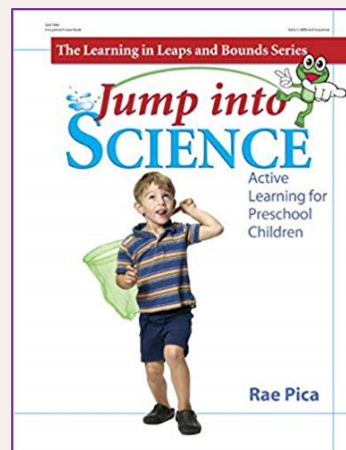
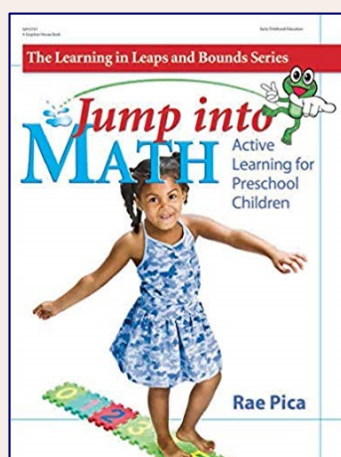
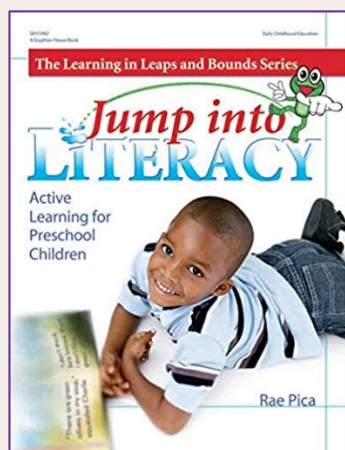


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# RAE PICA



Rae has been an early childhood education consultant since 1980. Dedicated to developing and educating the whole child, she is the author of 22 books, including the text *Experiences in Movement & Music* (in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition), and two of her latest, *What If We Taught the Way Children Learn?* and *Acting Out! Avoid Behavior Challenges with Active Learning Games & Activities*.

Rae is a former adjunct instructor for the University of New Hampshire and is currently a blogger, online course creator, and popular virtual presenter. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, Eric Jensen's Learning Brain Expo, state WIC organizations, education conferences, resource and referral agencies, and schools in 46 states and Canada are among those who have invited Rae to address their groups.

As a consultant, Rae has shared her expertise with such groups as

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