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Books for baby: which ones and when?

A look around the children's 'books' section in my favourite book shop made me dizzy. There is a plethora of books for little ones. Between a lovely fairy story and an educational book on shapes and colours, which one should I choose and why?

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Your baby loves books! From early on, even though they do not understand the whole meaning of the story, they are fascinated. The colours, materials and sounds are magical! They enter a marvellous, dream-like world, rich in emotions and feelings. A unique pleasure that they share with you and that helps them grow.

More than just stories...

The book begins, develops an idea, then ends. This is obvious to us adults but for little ones there's a lot more to it! **The narrative enables them to develop their beliefs**, by providing a beginning and an ending. To and fro between the real and the imaginary, they structure their personality. This is essential from the earliest stages.

But stories told in books, and in particular in fairy tales are not simply a narrative staging characters. They enable children to understand and **integrate, in a concrete and fun way, major concepts such as sibling** rivalry, the fear of abandon or even injustice and violence. They answer to certain fears that children feel without being able to express them...

Reading is also a time for sharing and discussion. It is a way of forming a relationship other than through speech. Even if your child does not understand it all that doesn't matter. The pretty words, pictures to look at and fabrics to touch and feel trigger emotions that your child can share with you.

How to choose a book?

From 3 or 4 months, little ones love **plastic-coated or fabric books**. They may not "read" them in the strict sense of the word but they can chew them and touch them: a highly personal way of appropriating them. Books for the bath are also a big favourite at this age!

Little by little **their approach to reading changes**. They like touch-and-feel books or books with little windows to open, books to listen to, with songs or stories on a CD, picture books with big, colourful illustrations etc. Prefer the more resistant cardboard versions as baby is not too careful with them to begin with!

Even little, children are **fans of series** such as the Mr Men and Little Misses. This enables them to view characters that they are already familiar with and to follow their adventures.

A bedtime story...

The evening is the ideal time for reading a story. For some children, it is even a **sacred ritual** that parents must not break with. Your child is very fond of this moment as they are able to share it with you: they have you all to themselves and make the most of it. Your child takes great pleasure in reading it with you.

The bedtime story enables your child **to go to sleep peacefully** and they often ask for the same story to be read night after night. The words repeated over and over again reassure and soothe them.

But don't forget that **dialogue is also important**. Take advantage of the occasion to discuss the story and share your feelings...or even invent your own story together.

Opinion

Saira, Rida's mum

«When I was little, I used to love Peter and the Wolf. My mother or father would often read the book to me at night before I went to sleep. It's now my turn to tell the story to my daughter, and she likes it as much as I do !»

Almost one parent out of two (46 %) says that they read a bedtime story to their children. 99 % of parents believe that reading enhances the imagination, 98 % that it is a time of complicity and 90 % that it makes bedtime easier for children.

Source: Ipsos survey conducted from 3-5 June 2009. 602 parents of children under 3 years were questioned.

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