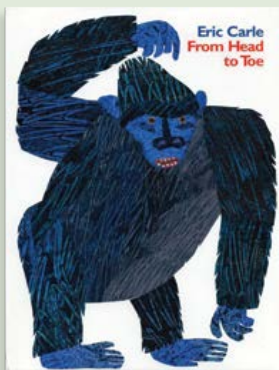


Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...

Building Early Vocabulary with *From Head to Toe*



For children who are just starting to talk, book reading provides great opportunities for introducing new words. Books with simple and colorful illustrations and a simple storyline help them understand the meanings of words and provide them with opportunities to use new words

In this Book Nook post, we'll share a fun strategy for building early vocabulary – a key emergent literacy skill for preparing young children for school success.

The Book

From Head to Toe by Eric Carle

Why we picked it

This simple book features a different animal on each page, and each animal tells us about an action that he can do. For example, the giraffe can bend his neck, the elephant can stomp his foot, and the cat can arch his back. This is a great book for building early vocabulary because:

- **Action words stand out** – When we think of building vocabulary, we often think about nouns (object words like “car”, “spoon” and “hat”). But it’s important for your child to learn a variety of word types so that he has all the building blocks to form sentences when he’s ready. This book is all about the actions the animals can do, making it easy to help your child understand verbs like “wave”, “shake” and “bend”.
- **Illustrations demonstrate the words** – Simple illustrations with lots of white space make it easy for children to focus on the pictures and understand what’s happening. In this book, each illustration clearly demonstrates a verb, which helps children understand it.

Why we chose it *Con't*

- **The book involves your child** – After each animal describes the action he can do, he speaks directly to the reader to ask if she can do it too. For example, after the donkey shows us he can kick his legs, he asks, “Can you do it?” This creates a fun opportunity for the child to try out the action herself, which will help her learn the word.

First reading

The first step is to select appropriate words for your child to learn. These are words your child will first need to **understand** before she can go on to use them herself.

Words that you want to help your child **understand** should:

- **be interesting to your child** – Build on your child’s curiosity by labeling her interests. If she points to the giraffe bending his neck, make sure to describe what she sees. For example, “yes, that giraffe is bending his long neck!”
- **be specific** – Children will better understand and learn words that are concrete, rather than vague. The action words in *From Head to Toe* are very concrete, but each action is followed by a vague question: “Can you do it?” After reading this line, you can ask the question again using the concrete word you want your child to learn: “Can you *bend* your neck?”
- **occur throughout the day** – Choose words that you can say in a variety of contexts. The more your child hears a word, the more likely she’ll be to say it. In *From Head to Toe*, you might talk about the donkey who can “kick” his legs. Think about other times you can use the word “kick” (for example, when your child “kicks” off his boots or when he “kicks” a ball outside).
- **involve a variety of word types** – In addition to the names of things (nouns), you want to make sure you’re helping your child learn a variety of other word types, like describing words (e.g., “soft”, “cold”, “sad”), location words (e.g., “beside”, “under”, “inside”) and action words (e.g., “run”, “hide”, “frown”). *From Head to Toe* offers many action words to choose from, as well as nouns (the names of the animals and their body parts).

Once your child understands a word, she may then start to **use** it. Your child will be most likely to use words that:

- **start with a sound she can make** – For example, if your child already says words that starts with “b”, like “baby” or “ball”, it will be easiest for her to learn a word that also starts with the sound /b/, like “bend”.
- **are motivating for her to say** – In *From Head to Toe*, your child might be most motivated to name the animals as they appear, or to say the action word as she shows that she can do the action herself (for example, “kick, kick!”)
- **can be used by your child in many different situations** – For example, a word like “wave” can be used whenever your child says hello or goodbye to someone, or when trying to get someone’s attention.

Re-reading

The next step to help your child learn a new word is to make it “sparkle” or stand out. In Hanen’s ABC and Beyond™ and I’m Ready!™ guidebooks, we talk about making new words sparkle with a strategy called “Shoot for the SSTaRS”. It’s an acronym that stands for: **S**tress, **S**how, **T**ell and **R**elate, and **S**ay it again.

Here’s an example of how you could “shoot for the SSTaRS” in *From Head to Toe* with the word “stomp”:

Stress

Make the word stand out from the other words by saying it louder and slower than the rest of the text. You can also highlight it by pausing before and after saying the word. For example, “I am an elephant and I... **stomp**... my foot.”

Show

The next step is to show your child what the word means. You can do this by pointing to the illustration of the elephant stomping his foot. You can also demonstrate the word yourself as you say it (for example, **stomp** your own foot as you say the word).

Tell

This is when you explain to your child what the word means. You might say, “**Stomp** is when you bang your foot down really hard and it makes a loud noise”. It can also be helpful to explain a word by saying what it is not. For example, you can say, “the elephant doesn’t walk softy and quietly with his feet. Instead, he stomps them down hard.”

and Relate

Relating the new word to other concepts or experiences that are familiar to your child will make the word more meaningful and help your child associate the word with other situations. You could relate “stomp” to other experiences by saying things like, “the elephant **stomps** his foot the same way you stomp your feet in the big puddles when it rains” or “yesterday you **stomped** your foot when you were upset because we had to leave the park.”

Say it again...!

This is another essential step to help your child learn new words: repeat the word both by re-reading the book, and by saying the word again in other situations. If your child likes *From Head to Toe*, chances are she’ll want to hear it again and again. This will give you many opportunities to shoot for the SSTaRS with “stomp”. You’ll also want to use the word in different situations throughout the day – for example, you could talk about how you stomp your feet on the mat to get the dirt or snow off when you come in from outside.

Some more tips

- Once your child is familiar with a word, you will not need to **stress** and **show** the word as much but can spend more time **relating** the word to your child's experience to deepen her understanding of the meaning.
- After you've said **stomp** several times, and your child becomes familiar with the book, you can pause and wait before saying the word to see if your child will use a sound, a word, or a gesture, to say it for you. For example, you could say, "I am an elephant and I...", and then wait to see if your child will attempt to say "stomp my foot". Remember to acknowledge any look, gesture, sound, or word as your child's attempt to fill in the word. After she takes her turn, you can say "**stomp** my foot", modeling the full word for her and giving her another opportunity to hear it.

The more times you read the book, the more "shooting for the SSTaRS" you can do! Over time, your child will understand (and eventually use!) many of the words in the book.

Happy reading!

We hope you enjoyed this Book Nook post.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, feel free to [send us your feedback](#).