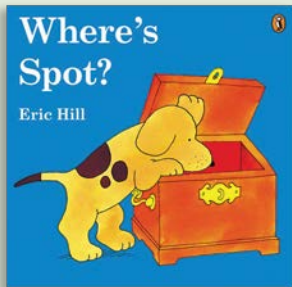


Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...

Building Early Vocabulary with *Where's Spot?*



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.

Let's get started!

The Book

Where's Spot? by Eric Hill.

Why we picked it

This is a simple, lift-the-flap book about a mother dog named Sally who searches all over the house for her pup, Spot. On each page, she looks in a different location (in the closet, under the bed, behind the door, etc.), and children can lift the flap to see if Spot is there. Under each flap is a big surprise – not Spot, but all kinds of other animals you'd never expect!

This book is great for building vocabulary because:

- Even children with few words can participate by lifting the flaps while you name the animal underneath.

Continued on next page...

Why I picked it *Con't*

- The variety of word types in the book provide many words to consider introducing to your child. For example, there are object names (“door”, “clock”, “stairs”, “bed”), action words (“open”, “hiding”, “eating”) and location words (“inside”, “behind”, “under”)
- The word “no” is repeated on each page, so children can practice saying this word by answering the question each time they lift the flap
- The illustrations are simple and attention-grabbing because they are surrounded by a lot of white space. They also clearly show what is happening in the story, which helps to convey the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Selecting first words

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. In *Where’s Spot?* you might notice that your child really likes the picture of the bear. If that’s the case, be sure to name it.
- **be specific** – Children will better understand and learn words that are concrete, rather than vague. For example, instead of saying “your turn” or “lift it” when you want your child to lift the flap, you can be more specific by saying, “You can lift the flap”, or “you can open the door”.
- **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 *Where’s Spot?*, you might talk about an animal being “under” the piano. Think about when else you could talk about “under” (for example, when a toy is “under” the sofa, or when your child is “under” a blanket during a game of peek-a-boo)
- **involve a variety of word types** – Include names of things, actions, and location words. In *Where’s Spot?*, some action words you might focus on are “open”, “go”, or “look”. Some location words might be “under”, “inside” or “on top”.

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

- **are motivating for her to say** – In *Where’s Spot?*, your child might be most motivated to name the animals as they appear, or to say “no” when the animal is not a dog.
- **start with a sound she can make** – If your child already has words that start with “b” (for example “baby” or “ball”), you could consider choosing a word that starts with the sound /b/, like “bye” or “bear”.
- **can be used by your child in many different situations throughout the day** – For example, words like “no” and “open” are useful words that are likely to come up over and over (and over!) again.

The strategy: Shoot for the SSTaRS

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 Say it again.

Here’s an example of how you could “shoot for the SSTaRS” in *Where’s Spot?* with the word “under”:

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 pause before and after saying the word. You could say, “Is Spot **under** the piano?”

Show

The next step is to show your child what the word means. You can do this by using gestures or facial expressions, or by pointing to an illustration. For example, you could point to the turtle hiding underneath the piano, and say “It’s a turtle **under** the piano, not Spot”

Tell

This is when you explain to your child what the word means. Sometimes the best way to explain a word is to say what it is and what it is not. For example, you can tell your child what “under” means by saying, “the turtle is not on **top** of the piano, he is hiding **under** the piano”.

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 “under” to other experiences by saying things like, “this turtle is **under** the piano just like you hide **under** the table when we play hide and seek.”

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 *Where’s Spot?*, chances are she’ll want to hear it again and again. This will give you many opportunities to shoot for the SSTaRS with “under”. You’ll also want to shoot for the SSTaRS throughout the day in different situations. For example, if your child wants to play peek-a-boo, you might say “I’m going to hide **under** the blanket.”

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 **under** several times, and your child becomes familiar with the story, you can wait before saying the word **under** to see if your child will use a sound, a word, or a gesture, to say it for you. For example, you could say, “Where’s Spot? Is he...?” and then wait to see if your child will attempt to say “under”. 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 “under”, 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 hopefully use) many of the words in the story.

Happy Reading!

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