Once upon a time, I was a kindergarten teacher. I spent my days teaching letters, numbers, letter sounds, and rhyming words. Many children lacked the ability to hear the rhyme within words and were not able to make rhyming words. When I transitioned to public libraries, my goals didn’t change. My target audience just grew younger. I encouraged parents of toddlers to sing and say nursery rhymes with their young children so that they might have an easier time learning to read when they went to school.

If you want your child to be a successful reader, start young with rhymes. In education, more would appear to be better, but often, powerful tools can be overlooked. A picture book is a valuable resource, and its strength belies its short format.

I have shared Mem Fox’s Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes, a 158-word treasure, with parents at our library baby, or lapsit, programs. The rhyming text and Helen Oxenbury’s beautiful illustrations make this simple picture book ideal to use with our youngest library patrons.
The book also encourages parent participation with the repetition of the title phrase. Parents chime right in when we get to the phrase “had ten little fingers and ten little toes” (unpaged). The words are reinforced as they touch their child’s fingers and toes. On the final page of the story, each one of them gives their child three little kisses on the nose. As Emilie Buchwald said in Booklove (2000), “Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.” Parents are the first teachers of their children. This is education one cannot receive at school. No school can substitute the learning that takes place in this atmosphere or make up for the lack of it.

What better way to begin a child’s early education than with a beautifully illustrated picture book? Just take a look inside and you will see how to capture a child’s attention and begin to draw them into the world of books.

The illustrated babies in this contemporary picture book look just like those I see in our weekly storytime programs. It has been a joy to share a multicultural book within the program and to encourage parents to later check it out so that they can see themselves among the children depicted.

The rhythmic story is a great example of a book perfectly suited to the very young child since stories in rhyme help develop a child’s phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is one of the six early literacy skills that children need before going to school. This is the ability to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words. Babies and toddlers are much better at hearing different phonemes than adults, which makes this the perfect time to read aloud to them. If children are able to hear the beginning and ending sounds that make up words, they will have an easier time sounding out words when they begin to read. Sharing books like Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes is the beginning of teaching a child to learn to read. A child first hears similarities and differences in the sounds of words and will continue to develop awareness of these sounds until she or he will be able to insert the rhyming words at the end of a phrase and manipulate the sounds of the words. Books in rhyme are easy to read with a child and stories with a repeated phrase are good for a child to read with you.

There are many other books by Mem Fox and Helen Oxenbury each perfectly suited to the under-two crowd. The rhyme included in this new title is sure to captivate our youngest audience.

Works Cited

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About the Author
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