

# JUNXION

FOR RESIDENTS, BY RESIDENTS

## Growing up Hannum

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Foremost Equestrian Family



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## raising great kids

By resident education specialist Perk Musacchio

# say *what?*

**Perk Musacchio explains how Mother Goose, Jack and Jill, and Little Bo Peep teach little ones to speak.**

Children's communication skills begin to blossom between the ages of birth and three years old. The most effective ways to nurture healthy language development are human interaction and conversation. Children who miss out on these real-life "face time" experiences often enter school with limited background knowledge, experiences, vocabulary, and social skills.

As babies become toddlers, nursery rhymes, which have been around for over 100 years, used to be favorite bedtime reads for many children. However, more and more young children have never been exposed to these important rhymes. You might ask, how in the world is hearing about Little Boy Blue or Jack and Jill going to help my child? Some would say they are violent and strange, and yes, some are. Despite that, many child development experts have discovered an amazing fact. Children who know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they are four years old are usually among the best readers and spellers in their class by the time they are eight years old!

Here are reasons why reading nursery rhymes is important for children's overall development.

- **Hearing nursery rhymes can calm an upset child.** Young children, even babies, fall in love with nursery rhymes because the rhymes echo the rhythmic "beat-beat-beat" of Mommy's heartbeat.
- **Nursery rhymes improve language development.** The rhythm and rhyme help children hear sounds that are necessary to learn how to read, and rhymes help grow a child's vocabulary, which is so important for comprehension.
- **Nursery rhymes are all about a child's daily routine activities.** Building routines around daily activities can help children feel more secure

because life is predictable. Rhymes often refer to routines like sleeping, eating, getting dressed, and bathing.

- **Nursery rhymes are good for brain development.** Learning rhymes helps build memory skills that can be applied to all sorts of lifelong activities.
- **Learning nursery rhymes improves confidence.** When young children can fill in the missing word to a rhyme or even recite the rhyme all by themselves, they feel proud. Nursery rhymes provide a connection with movement (clap or act out rhyme), rhythm, and words, and we know movement helps create memories and enhances learning.

As children get older, their language, like all developmental skills, builds much like a ladder. There are foundational skills that must be achieved for efficient word knowledge and storage.

As children learn language, they begin by *labeling* people and things. Doggy. Mommy. Daddy. Next, they learn what things are used for or their *function*. Some of the early favorite toys do just that by imitating what you do ... mowing the lawn, sweeping and raking, working in their little kitchen, or hammering at the workbench. These toys help them to understand and talk about the function of things. Then they can begin to make *associations* between items like shoes and socks or fork, knife and spoon. Teaching children *categories, similarities, and differences* is critical for all future receptive and expressive language skills, as well as future academic success. For example, mittens and gloves are types of clothing or outerwear but how are they the same? How are they different? Many young children will tell you the way they are different is "they aren't the same." That's where you, Mom or Dad, come in to help them notice and verbalize the similarities and differences.

When teaching children new vocabulary, it is helpful to explain the word by stating the category, function, and attributes. For example, a hammer is a tool (category) that is used for pounding nails into wood. It can also be used to remove a nail from wood (function). It has a wooden or metal handle with a metal head. One end of the head has a two-prong claw, and the other end has a round end for pounding (attributes).

Defining words in this manner helps deepen the understanding of the word's meaning and provides

many cues for visualizing the object or concept, which helps with future word retrieval. One more way to enhance learning the word is to build in movement. As you are explaining the word, have your child use a hammer or pretend to hammer. In addition to learning the meaning of hammer, take advantage of the "teachable moment" to explain that words can have *multiple meanings*. Head of a hammer. Your own head. Claw of a hammer. Claw of an animal.

If children don't hear and learn language, they will have difficulty with verbal and written expression and comprehension. Many times, when students struggle with comprehension, their difficulties often stem from weaknesses in one or two areas- vocabulary and/or concept imagery. I have learned to assume nothing and always question their understanding of all vocabulary words and concepts. Consider this real-life example. My student was reading a short story that began like this: "The grizzly bear hunts salmon as they swim up rivers. Sometimes the bear stands on a rock next to a small waterfall." When reading, students must be able to decode the words, but they also need to understand what the words mean. Good readers can read the words accurately and efficiently by decoding the letters and visualizing their meaning or making a "movie in their minds." This is called *concept imagery*. My student had no idea what a salmon was and no background knowledge of that common image of salmon jumping upstream. Instead, he pictured a big white bear on an iceberg. When one's interpretation is skewed, can you understand how comprehension would be affected? Always encourage your children to ask questions if they don't know what a word means, and Mom or Dad, you ask them just to be sure. It's common for them *not* to ask.

Here are some other fun activities that can nurture healthy language development.

### At Home or in the Car:

- Give your kids a category and have them come up with examples for that category OR say the members of a specific category and have your kids name the category. You might have to teach your kids to visualize themselves in the place to "see" more options or go down the alphabet. For example: The category is "FRUITS." Some kids will randomly say a few fruits, and then they are stumped. Cue them to close their eyes and see themselves in the produce section of the grocery store (they may not know the word "produce"). What do you see? This might stimulate a few more rapid responses. Try going down the alphabet ... Apple, Banana, Cantaloupe OR think of fruits in color groups. Name all the fruits that are yellow, red, green, etc. Then raise the stakes a bit by asking, "How are an apple and a strawberry the same? How are they different?"
- Play games like Scattergories and Outburst.
- Have fun with *idioms* (It was raining cats and dogs), *homophones* (made-maid), and *homonyms/multiple meaning* words (ring-ring). A simple google search will yield lists of examples, and there are many children's books and games that help nurture these higher-level language skills.
- Word of the day. Pick a new word to learn and use each day. There are calendars that can be purchased or make your own!
- *Analogy* of the day.  
Car is to automobile as \_\_\_\_\_ is to swamp.  
wet, low, marsh
- Consider audiobooks for car rides especially for those who get carsick. As they listen to the narrator, children have to "make a movie" in their minds.
- Read to and with your children from the day they are born. Even when they

can read on their own, kids may still enjoy hearing you read a story or eventually, they may like to discuss a book with the family.

### While Out and About:

- It definitely is more challenging, but never underestimate the value of taking your kids with you when you run errands. Going to the post office, the vet, the grocery store, the barber or salon, etc. creates opportunities for learning-related vocabulary words. Talk to your kids while completing your errand. At the local grocery or hardware store, point out the overhead signs that tell about the area. These are often category words such as "condiments" or "appliances" and provide a great opportunity to "show and label" items with new vocabulary. Having conversations with your children while visiting community places is invaluable to building background knowledge and vocabulary, which are critical for future reading comprehension.
- I Spy something that is very large, brown and black and has two floppy ears... (the family dog). Use attributes/adjectives such as color, size, shape, number, and texture to develop vocabulary and build a strong image. Use concept and directional words to help with following directions. "I see something *under* the table/*on* top of the refrigerator/*next* to the shelf."
- I'm thinking of something that is a tool (category) and is used to hang pictures (function). It has a cylinder-shaped wooden handle and a metal top with a claw on one end and a round pounding part on the other (attributes). "Is it a hammer?" asks your child.
- I'm going on a picnic and I'm taking an apple. Next person repeats and adds something that begins with B. The third person repeats and adds something that begins with C, and so on.

Isn't it reassuring to know that snuggling with your child and reading nursery rhymes, storybooks, playing games, or just having a conversation are all important and fun ways that can have a very positive effect on your child's future success in life?!

Perk Musacchio is the co-author of *No Manual, No Problem: Strategies and Interventions to Help Your Child Thrive in Today's World* where many of these strategies and more can be found. She is also co-author of *A Student's Guide to Communication and Self-Presentation* and the originator of the PeaceWalk®. For more information, visit her website at [www.skillstosoar.com](http://www.skillstosoar.com).