

LAVA  
7

literacy



*Literacy Lava supports your kids' reading, writing and communicating with creativity.*

In this seventh edition of Literacy Lava, you'll find ideas for helping kids create characters in their own writing; suggestions for word game fun; secrets about getting kids reading; all about board books for young children; lots of ideas for getting the most from a trip to the art gallery with children; a celebration of the magic of children's literacy; and ideas to inspire budding writers. I'm thrilled to introduce our new *Writing Tips for Kids* column, by author and literacy advocate, Dee White. And this time, the *Activity* page for kids was designed by author, illustrator and scientist, Andrea Hazard. Wow!

I hope you'll have fun with the ideas in Literacy Lava 7, while helping your kids build the skills they need to read, write and communicate successfully. Why not spread the word about the magic of children's literacy by sharing your copy of Literacy Lava with a friend?

I encourage you to follow the links to contributors' blogs and websites. Our writers are a diverse group, but all have this in common: a passion for children's literacy and a genuine desire to share their own love of learning. If there's something special you'd like to see in the next issue of Literacy Lava, something you want information about, or to give some feedback, you can always contact me via [The Book Chook blog](http://TheBookChook.blog).

**The Book Chook**, editor.

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*You may have tangible wealth untold: Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold. Richer than I you can never be — I had a mother who read to me.*

—Strickland Gillilan

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# Contributors to Literacy Lava

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## Dee White

Dee White is the award-winning author of *Letters to Leonardo*, *Hope for Hanna*, *A Duel of Words* and *Harry's Goldfield Adventure*. She's passionate about encouraging reading and writing, and her [blog](#) and [website](#) have career and writing tips for aspiring young authors.

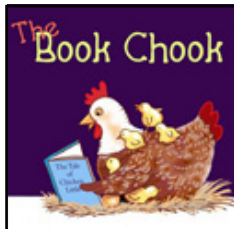
Dee runs writing workshops for children of all ages and mentors young writers through the PLIESE program. She lives in regional Australia and gains her writing inspiration from her husband, her two boys and enough animals to almost fill an ark.

## A Peaceful Day



Jeanne Grant Webb is an Aussie mum who homeschools her daughter, Jemimah, using the methods developed by English educator, Charlotte Mason. Instead of school at home, Jemimah learns through literature, not textbooks. Her days are filled with music and art appreciation, nature study, poetry, foreign language and Shakespeare, along with many hours each day spent outside.

Jeanne's blog, [A Peaceful Day](#), allows her to indulge her all-consuming love of children's literature – particularly Australian literature – as well as writing about all the other things that help children love to learn. Come and join the conversation!



## The Book Chook

The [Book Chook](#) blog shares snippets from the wonderful world and words of kids' learning, literacy and literature. You'll find tips for parents, book and software reviews, ideas for developing reading, writing and communicating skills with children, and the occasional rant!

The Book Chook's real name is Susan Stephenson. I'm a writer, teacher, reviewer, and editor of Literacy Lava. Find more information about me at [my website](#), or a list of my published writing credits at [Coffs Coast Writers](#).



## Rebecca Newman

Rebecca Newman is the publisher and editor of [Alphabet Soup](#)—an Australian magazine for children aged 6 to 12 who love books and creative writing. Rebecca lives in Perth with her husband, three young children and a teetering 'to read' pile.



## The Almost Librarian

The [Almost Librarian](#) blog celebrates and promotes early childhood education, early literacy and family by providing on-line resources, book and music recommendations, and activity ideas for parents, caregivers, librarians and teachers.



## BeAFunMum

Kelly Burstow combines her passion for design, art, children's books, photography, fashion, writing and parenting in her blog, [Be A Fun Mum](#).

The [Be A Fun Mum](#) Blog is all about reclaiming the joy of parenting in a fast-paced world. It's about loving the little moments which are like pieces of a puzzle, together creating a beautiful masterpiece.



## Mad Science, Groovy Art for Kids

Andrea Hazard is a writer, illustrator and scientist. She has many years experience engaging children in fun, interactive activities both inside and outside the classroom, and she shares these activities in her [Mad Science, Groovy Art for Kids](#) blog. For more about Andrea and her books, visit her [website](#).



by Dee White

## Creating Great Characters with Collages



**Dee White** is the author of four books for children and young adults. You can find out more about her at [www.deescribe.com.au](http://www.deescribe.com.au) . More writing tips are available at [her blog](#).

I'm an author who enjoys nothing more than delving into the wonderful world of my imagination. So for me literacy isn't just about reading, it's also about writing. It's about enjoying the stories of others and having the freedom and encouragement to create your own.

Kids need to learn to write to the requirements of the school curriculum and later on, the workforce. They need to learn the skills of writing different types of text on a given topic to a certain length.

But just like kids can go through reading slumps, the same thing can happen with writing. It has happened to my two boys and it happened to me in Primary school. Happily, I overcame it and became an author.

Watching my own kids go through that dreaded slump, I think I've worked out what happened. All through their early school years they weren't allowed to write on a topic of their choice or even to the length they wanted. For every story they were given a story starter with characters already created and an almost predestined path. They were required to write to a certain length and not given time to complete more complex stories.

Writing to specifications and deadlines is a great skill to have but imagine if you were told what to cook every day, and never had a choice – never got to explore the food from other cultures – were

never allowed to try making that exotic chocolate dessert? After a while you'd probably become bored and lose your incentive to cook – or at the very least, you'd stop trying new things, stop trying to explore the culinary world. The same thing can happen with writing.

Every child, no matter what their level of literacy, has an imagination - a place inside their head where nobody else can go. That's the great thing about writing. It can take you anywhere.

Recently I worked with an inspiring group of high school kids who loved creating stories. One of them had learning issues and wasn't able to physically write the words down, but he had the most amazing ideas and ability to tell a story. I got him to type his story directly onto the computer and when his mind was working too fast for his keyboard skills, he dictated to me and I typed for him. So even if a child has trouble reading, it doesn't mean they can't write. You can always get them to tell their story into a recording device and type it up later.

### CHARACTER COLLAGES

I find that most kids start with either an idea of what they want to happen in their story, or a person/character they would like to write about. On the next page is a fun activity for kids to create a memorable hero or villain and use this character to get their story off to a flying start.





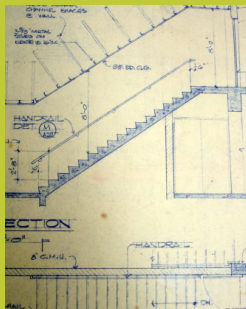
### Step one

Think about what your character might look like. Find a picture in a magazine. Cut it out and stick it on a blank piece of paper.



### Step two

Where does your character live? Find a picture of the house or area they might live in.



### Step three

Often the action will take place in your character's school or home – find or draw plans for the layout of the main buildings used in the story. This helps you get your characters from one place to the other without accidentally going through walls.



### Step four

Find pictures of your main character's friends and add them to your collage.



### Step five

Add pictures of your character's hobbies, clothes and favourite things or something he or she might want.

Now you know all this about your character, you'll have an understanding of what might happen in his or her life and how he or she might respond to those events. This is where we find plot – the frame that writers hang their story from.

I'll discuss plotting and how stories come from people in the next Literacy Lava. I hope you can join me then.



# Fun with Words

by Susan Stephenson, [The Book Chook](#)

Word games are a great way to involve your children in something fun that also sneaks a little education into their day. By manipulating letters, identifying sounds, generating words and playing with language, our kids are gaining the building blocks they need to become readers, writers and spellers. And all while playing a game!

Here are some Book Chook ideas:



**I Spy:** This is usually one of the earliest word games we teach our kids. It's about one player spotting something within visual range, and telling the other player what sound it starts with. "I spy with my little eye, something beginning with b." The sound letter B makes rather than the letter name (bee) is best for young kids as it's easier for them to make the link. If your children like the game, they might enjoy some of the I Spy books, which focus more on finding hidden pictures.

**What's Missing?:** Not really a formal game, What's Missing is when a parent or teacher leaves out a word and asks children to identify it. It might be during an often-read story or nursery rhyme: "Humpty Dumpty had a great ..." Children will join in enthusiastically to provide the missing word. It's also great fun when Dad changes one word in a story: "So the three bears went for a walk in the marshmallow."

**Build-a-word:** Having letter blocks, magnetic letters, plastic letters, and alphabet letters stuck onto LEGO bricks all available to kids is a great idea. It means, that like books, letters and possible words are built into their play. Grab an occasional opportunity yourself to build a word, perhaps your child's name, a pet's name, "mum" or "dad". Make it a natural part of the play rather than formal instruction.

**Hangman:** You don't need to use a hanging man to play this game - you can choose some other graphic. The idea is for one player to have a word in mind, draw a short line that stands for each letter of the word, and ask the other player to guess at letters. Each time a guess is incorrect, you add one element to the hangman or other graphic. There are also lots of online versions, like this [Friendly Hangman](#).

**Make-a-word:** Once children are old enough to spell, it's fun to involve them in word-generating games. An old standby is to take a long word and see how many small words we can make from the letters in it. So, from elephant, we can make hat, pant, pale, tale, help, panel etc There are lots of variations around, or you and your kids can introduce your own rules.

**Board Games:** These make great gifts for the whole family. My family loves Boggle, Blurt, and Balderdash but we're also happy with a crossword or even playing a game like Hink Pink while driving on a long trip. You'll find directions for playing Hink Pink, and more wonderful word games at my blog, under [Book Chook Bag of Tricks](#).

## Play Word Games Online

**Save the Words:** perfect for older kids, this website encourages us to adopt a word, perhaps one on the brink of extinction. Scrolling allows you to hone in on other words, clicking shows you the definition.

**Scribble:** gives you 10 random letters, then you must make as many words as possible, using pencil and paper.

**Wordslide:** get random letters to slide together to generate words within a time limit.

**Wordle:** another Book Chook favourite, Wordle enables us to generate word clouds from any text we paste in.

**School Time Games:** there are lots of word games on this web site's Language Arts page. The Book Chook, of course, likes Fowl Words and Chicktionary.

**Syllables Factory:** Syllables Factory is a BBC game that helps kids revise how to break up words into syllables (chunks of sound).

**Fit Brains:** You need to register for Fit Brains, but many games are free. Some of the word-based games are: Wild Word Garden, Word Power, Street of Dreams, Paradise Island. Fun for all!

# Story Time with Dad

by  
Kelly Burstow,  
[BeAFunMum](#)



In our family, I used to do most of the reading to the children. There are reasons for this. Firstly, my husband is rarely home around story time. Secondly, I love reading aloud to my children, and – dare I admit it – I do it better. How arrogant of me! Different isn't always better, so I've been working to incorporate my husband into story time. I want our life to be one where stories are told and read as we go about our day.

## THE WHY

"Fathers should make an extra effort to read to their children. Because the vast majority of primary-school teachers are women, young boys often associate reading with women and schoolwork. And just as unfortunate, too many fathers would rather be seen playing catch in the driveway with their sons than taking them to the library." -- Jim Trelease (Read Aloud Handbook)

Here are two more reasons fathers should read to their children:

**Reinforcement** If both Mum and Dad show, by example, the importance of books and reading, it's more likely a child will value them too.

**Bonding** Read-aloud time can be a beautiful time to bond with a child. Physical closeness during reading a book is wonderful, and fathers deserve the opportunity to experience this too.

## THE HOW

There are no rules, but there are some secrets. 1. It's important to find something the father enjoys

reading so he'll be comfortable sharing it. 2. Find the right time for Dad to read. It doesn't have to be at night. Snug in bed, first thing Saturday morning, can be a wonderful time to read with a child. 3. Incorporate stories into the life of your family. It's great to have a regular time to read stories; however, it's essential to encourage the love of learning and include stories in everyday life. Life is a story and there is so much for everyone to share.

Here's what we've discovered about Dad and reading time:

**Silly Books** My husband loves reading silly books. He makes noises and loves to make the children laugh.

### Sharing Childhood Memories

Story time doesn't always need to be a sitting down affair. My husband often tells stories of his own childhood in the car or while playing ball outside.

**Non-fiction Books** One of my son's favourite books to read with his dad is The Australian Fishing & Lure Encyclopaedia. My son also loves sitting with his grandfather, reading a Wheels car magazine. What a fortunate boy he is to have such wonderful men in his life!

**Mistakes** A familiar story can be turned into a mistake hunt. This is an absolute favourite with our children. The idea is for Dad to make mistakes in the story and the children see if they can spot it.

**Two Copies** Sometimes Dad is not home at story time. An idea is have two copies of a favourite book. Keep one at home and

have Dad take one to work. This way, he can be part of the action even when he's not there through a phone story or web cam.

**Act It Out** Dad's are physical. They tickle. They rumble and tumble. By acting out a story, or a page from a book, it brings physical fun to story time.

Moving away from stereotypical story reading is a helpful way to include fathers into story time. Because Life is a story.



**From the Man Himself:**

"Reading to your children is an excellent way to connect with them on many levels including physical proximity, intellectual engagement and creative play. Story time can be full on and fun, or quiet and intimate. Having children of varying ages necessitates the use of a range reading material - I find this refreshing and I often learn something myself. Moreover, having your child sit with you while you go on journey together makes for an incredibly special time!" -- Matthew Burstow

### Books He Loves

*Uno's Garden* by Graeme Base  
*Animalia* by Graeme Base  
*Dig Dig Digging* by Margaret Mayo and Alex Ayliffe  
*Where's Wally* by Martin Handford

### External Links

[Dad Won't Read Aloud](#)  
[Fathers and children's education](#)



# Exploring the Simple Board Book

by Valerie Baartz, The Almost Librarian



The board book. Such a simple concept. It's a book made out of thicker, cardboard pages rather than regular paper pages. And that's it, right? Well, not exactly. There's more to consider regarding board books.

Who reads the board book?

Board books are a fantastic option for infants and toddlers. This size and style of book is mainly intended for children up to age three, but certainly is used and enjoyed beyond toddlerhood. Because the pages are sturdy, they hold up much better to tugging, twisting, pulling and chewing which are all ways that toddlers and babies explore books. If you hand a regular paged book to a baby, you would find a sopping piece of pulp within record time.

And not only does the book stand up to the test of toddler-time, but board books are easier for those chubby fingers and hands to grab hold and turn the pages of. Most board books are small and square or rectangular in shape, making them light enough for babies and toddlers to manipulate. This makes the books interesting and inviting.

What makes a good board book?

When considering a board book, you need to evaluate the illustrations, the text and how they work together. Board books for babies should have bright, contrasting, and simple illustrations in bold colors or in black and white. Toddlers also gravitate towards board books with photographic illustrations particularly of other babies or animals.

The text should be simple. You are looking for books with a few words or one sentence per page and very simple storylines. In fact, many

board books for toddlers are basic concept books that label emotions, objects, shapes, colors, animals, and other everyday components of a baby's life. This type of board book does not have a "story" at all.

Observe how the text and illustration work together. Do the words match the pictures on the page? Is the theme represented appropriate for very young children? Most board books for babies and toddlers relate to their everyday life and other favorite interests such as animals or transportation. Board books frequently provide an excellent opportunity for a multi-sensory experience with lift-the-flap pages, textured pages, and noise making pages such as squeakers.

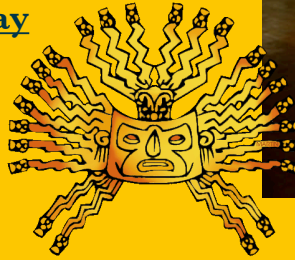
What is the main caution regarding board books?

Not all board books are intended for the infant and toddler age group. Some publishers are transforming traditional picture books into a board book format. Not all picture books are meant to be board books. Picture books are usually about 32 pages long. Board books are usually 16 pages or fewer, so publishers have to cut text and illustration or combine pages. Sometimes these books are wordy with advanced story lines for toddler listeners. Just because the book is a board book does not automatically mean it's the right book for your baby.

Your best plan is to stay with simple, bright board books intended for very young children. If you have any question about the quality of a board book, check with your local librarian or bookseller for recommendations. It's exciting that many board books options are available to share with and enrich the early reading experiences with your very young child.

# At the Art Gallery

by Jeanne Grant  
Webb, A Peaceful  
Day



Children love Art Galleries. True. All you need is to bring the magic to life - unlock the pages of the picture book - impart the secret spell. Galleries are not stuffy and boring. They are full of magic. Childhood magic.

We've been visiting galleries for a long time. We know our local gallery pretty well. The trick for us, I think, is to let our daughter set the pace. She decides what we'll see, and it is she who decides when it's time to go. Sometimes we wander freely around the whole gallery; at others we spend our time looking at just one exhibit. It's up to her. That doesn't mean that I never guide and direct, of course. When we pay money to see an international exhibition, then we naturally spend more time than usual. Even then though, we roam about according to what catches Jemimah's eye. Similarly, when we visit a gallery to see art painted by our current term's Picture Study, then we look specifically for his or her work alone. Those visits are structured, school type trips, not magical ones.

Sometimes we play the One Picture visit. "Pick one picture, Jemimah. Your favourite. We'll make a quick trip inside to see it." Recently, she chose McCubbin's *The Pioneer* first. This classic piece of Australian art had been visiting our local gallery, but alas it had returned home to the National Gallery of Victoria, so we were out of luck. Her second choice was Hilda Rix Nicholas' beautiful painting *In the bush*. You can see it [here](#). It is quite luminescent in reality. Last time we saw this picture it had been mounted as part of an exhibition of Rix Nicholas' art. The lighting was exquisite. Today it looked different, and Jemimah wanted to understand why. Isn't it great when you can explain the way the hanging of a painting affects its appearance because the child wants to know rather than you wanting him or her to know! After a few minutes looking at the painting and discussing the way she

had used a backlighting technique to such good effect, we were set to go. We'd achieved what we wanted from our visit.

Do you visit art galleries with your kids? What have your experiences been like?

Without being an authority on children, or on anything actually, here are some tips that work for us:

- Children have short attention spans. Be ready to leave when your child shows the first sign of being ready. Even when you've paid to enter. Don't let boredom set in.
- Visit a variety of galleries and look at different styles of art. Jemimah likes contemporary art very much. To me it is overrated, but what does my opinion have to do with it?
- Don't feel a need to see every piece of art. Wander from piece to piece. The need to see an exhibition systematically and in order may work for you, but it is not the only way to appreciate the works.
- Read out the labels on certain pictures. Often they contain information that will contribute to your child's enjoyment.
- Many displays designed especially for children are drivelly twaddle. Others are wonderful. The National Gallery of Victoria dual labelled a number of the pieces in last year's Dali exhibition, one set for children and another for the...ahem...more mature. Given Dali's sometimes questionable subject matter and lifestyle, this was appropriate, and controversial topics were successfully avoided. I will admit that as an almost mature big person, I enjoyed the fact that the more appropriate sanitised art was already laid out for me. I don't need to know everything that goes on in an artist's sometimes warped and tortured mind. **(continued next page)**



- If your child is struggling, design quick treasure hunt challenges as you look at the art: Find five pictures with animals in them. Find four pictures depicting winter. How many pictures show no signs of man? Which do you think is the artist's favourite colour? Which is your favourite picture? Can you find two pictures of the same view? How many different animals can you find? Can you find a house with a red roof? You get the idea. This can be good fun, and occupy a child effectively if you want them to look more at a certain group of works.
- Allow children the freedom and the time to discover something new, and remember to look at it with them.
- Answer their questions. If you don't know, the gallery staff probably will.
- Asking a child to look at a picture, and then tell you about it using the same methods we employ in Picture Study, is also enjoyable to kids that are used to doing this.
- Remember to take time to look for paintings that your children recognize. The ones you've studied become good friends, and it's exciting to find the original hanging on a gallery wall. If your child is not familiar with many pieces of art and you know you will see a particular picture during your visit, then you can show it to them on the computer screen or in an art book before you go.
- Try the One Picture visit described above. We do this a lot. You can always go back.
- Remember to explain the etiquette of the gallery visit before you go. Remind your children they will be asked to stay at least a foot from the paintings, or behind the line marked on the floor if there is one. Explain that you never ever ever touch a sculpture or painting. Ever. Not even when you're

grown up. If they run they will be asked not to by the gallery staff. Tell them!

- You know your children better than anyone. Look out for things you think they'll enjoy, even if you know their parents probably won't. You might be surprised when your visit to the collection of skateboard photographs is the highlight of your week. Galleries are really clever at putting together interesting displays of ...well... just about anything nowadays. You might discover an interest in common with your child!
- Take home a souvenir of your visit. A beautiful catalogue of a favourite artist's works is a real - and expensive - treat. Less costly is a post card or two to add to your child's collection. The reproductions in Jemimah's Picture Study book are much treasured already. Imagine her collection in a few more years!
- Remember that a visit to an Art Gallery is supposed to be a wonderful treat not a boring drudgery. Make it special. Make a visit to the Gallery Cafe for some treat-appropriate food or a babycino. Make it fun.

Above all, remember that your aim is to share the joy of art with your children. If it is not successful today then there is always a next time.

Enjoy it. We do.

*Jeanne is an Aussie mum who home schools her daughter, Jemimah, using the methods developed by English educator, Charlotte Mason. Instead of school at home, Jemimah learns through literature, not textbooks. Her days are filled with music and art appreciation, nature study, poetry, foreign language and Shakespeare, along with many hours each day spent outside.*



# The Magic of Literacy

by Susan  
Stephenson,

## The Book Chook

Some Online  
Resources  
for Parents  
on Reading  
and Writing  
with Kids:

Read Write  
Think

PBS KIDS

Reading  
Rockets

Colorin  
Colorado

CBeebies at  
the BBC



**Reading is magic.** When you encourage a child to read, you are actually conferring two special magical powers on him - the power to solve problems, and the power to enter other worlds.

**Reading is empowerment.** When you have a problem, often the answer can be found by reading. If you need to take a bus to another city, you read to find out how. If you want to pan for gold, there are books and web sites to help. When you can't defeat the Green Dragon on level 3, use this magical power on a cheat sheet.

**Reading is escape.** Everyone has times in their life when they want to be distracted or entertained. By reading a book, we can enter someone else's life and walk a mile in their shoes. If we all did this, it would increase tolerance in our society, because people hate what they fear or don't understand. Opening up the world of books to a child means giving him the power to enter others' worlds.

**But wait, there's more!** Aside from reading's magical properties, it's a gift that won't wear out, and it's inexpensive. Books are portable, quiet and stimulate imagination. They make fantastic gifts. A book won't grow too big, bark incessantly, and have to be returned to the Shelter. You don't have to run to the store to pick up batteries for print books, and they are easy to wrap too. E-books and magazine subscriptions might also be just the thing for your child's next birthday.

**Better still, upsize your gift and add writing too.** I guarantee that encouraging kids to read and write will make them and you feel great.

So how do we give our children the magical gifts of reading and writing?

**We read with our kids every day, at least once a day.** Lots of people like to read aloud to their children at bed time, but other times might fit into your day well too. Try reading aloud while your kids eat their lunch, or reading a poem or a song while you're at the traffic lights or waiting for the doctor.

Keeping books in reachable places in your home and car is a great idea. Encourage kids to choose a book when they need a break from boisterous play. **Letting them choose what they want to read gives children a sense of ownership**, so it's helpful to make sure they have their own library card and access to the library, as well as books they own.

**We let our kids see us both reading and writing**, and share with them what we enjoy about those times. Incorporating writing and reading into each day might be as simple as designating certain times as *read o'clock* and *write o'clock*. Activities like writing lists, letters, stories, captions for pictures, poems and preparing articles for the family blog become a fun habit this way, and make a great creative alternative to screen-based time.

Reading and writing are skills we need for life, both during school and afterwards. But best of all, reading and writing are immensely satisfying. Let's look around for opportunities to include our whole family in the magic of literacy!

# Inspiring Budding Writers

by Rebecca Newman,  
[Alphabet Soup Magazine](#)



My elder daughter loves books and music. My son loves ball games, cooking and maps. And my 4-year-old loves dancing and singing.

They all love to write.

When a child has a passion for an activity, parents generally support and nurture that passion. So our three are provided with books, balls and bats, recipes, time for cooking and making music, and unlimited access to our atlas and the street directory. Here are some of the things we do to encourage their passion for writing.

## **Provide journals**

All three have an exercise book. In these journals they write down ideas, stories and poems and jokes. My youngest likes to dictate her dreams after she wakes up in the morning.

## **Help with starting a diary**

A diary is good for keeping the writing flowing. No-one reads my 8-year-old's diary (except her), so she doesn't get bogged down with perfect spelling or sentences and can just get on with writing.

## **Put in a poetry wall**

We use chalk on our green fence in the backyard, but poetry wall possibilities are endless— you could try a blackboard, a whiteboard, a large piece of blank paper stuck on the fridge door ... Family members can write poems on the wall whenever it takes their fancy. (If you'd like a [peek at our poetry wall](#), I blogged about it during National Poetry Month.)

## **Use their poems as gifts**

Our grandmas and grandpas always love a home-grown poem on a handmade birthday card. A child's poem written on a paper scroll tied with ribbon makes a lovely gift.

## **Provide a reason for writing**

We look out for opportunities where children's writing can be published. Local councils sometimes publish children's writing and artwork in their newsletters, and some school newsletters have a 'kids' corner' with students' work. Children can submit writing to magazines such as [Stone Soup \(USA\)](#), [The Scrumbler \(UK\)](#), and [Alphabet Soup \(Australia\)](#).

## **Encourage them to enter writing competitions**

Competitions have restrictions as to topic and length and this helps to hone writing and editing skills. You

can find a list of children's writing competitions in Australia on [wordbox](#).

## **Introduce penpals**

I have friends overseas and our daughters recently began writing to each other. Finding real mail in your letter box definitely motivates kids to write! It also helps spelling. My 8-year-old's penpal speaks English as a second language. My daughter knows that she needs to check her spelling carefully so that her penpal doesn't get confused.

## **Listen to their oral storytelling & DIY puppet shows**

Oral storytelling is different from writing on a page. Retelling fairy tales or writing a script for a puppet show (and then putting it on) is good story practice for budding writers. My children also love designing a program to give to family and friends at the puppet show performance, including the performers' biographies.

Writing can be fun and extremely satisfying. Don't be surprised if you start out supporting your child's passion and end up in your own writing frenzy!

## **Other ideas to get the juices flowing:**

### **Share with other writers**

Older children could start a writing group to meet regularly and read each other's writing.

### **Email family news to a friend or relation**

Children can collate your family's news and keep relatives up to date.

### **Create a magazine or newsletter on a favourite subject to share with family or friends.**

### **Encourage reading and continue to read to them (even older children)**

Every author I've interviewed says reading improves your writing. Sign your child up for his/her own library card if they don't have one already. It's free!

### **Audio**

If you have the technology, ask your children to write and record a 'news show' about what has been happening. Share it with a grandparent, family friend or penpal.

### **Keep a book diary**

Ask your child to keep a list of the books have read, with a brief review and rating.



# online extras

Here are nine great free resources that might be just the thing to help your family's reading, writing, communicating and creating needs.

## read

1

Read along while you play and learn in [Darwin's Footsteps](#).

2

Read some popular classics online at [Classics for Young People](#).

3

Find easy learn-to-read activities at [Starfall](#).

## write

4

Write a family newsletter with your kids at [LetterPop](#).

5

Grab some quirky stationery for kids' own stories at [Kidopo](#).

6

Create a comic book online at [ToonDoo](#).

## create

7

Make interesting pictures with online photo editor [Pixlr](#).

8

Create a graph or chart at [NCES Kids' Zone](#).

9

Find creative learning activities for preschoolers at [Chateau Meddybemps](#).



### ~Our Philosophy~

We encourage our children to be involved in activities that support their literacy.

We read to our children every day, because it is one of the very best things we can do for them.

We talk with, read with, sing to, dance with, love and respect our children.

We help our children learn to read so they can read to learn.

We create a rich and varied literacy environment for our children.

We let our children catch us reading, writing and creating in our everyday lives, so they can see it's both natural and fun.

We believe that stories encourage dreams, and reading helps kids make their dreams come true.

Want more **Literacy Lava**? Please leave a comment on [The Book Chook blog](#). We'd love to discover what you valued, and want to see more of. If you and your children enjoyed an activity or suggestion from this issue, or you have a question we might be able to help with, let us know!



"Learning is finding out what you already know. Doing is demonstrating that you know it. Teaching is reminding others that they know it just as well as you. You are all learners, doers, teachers"  
~Richard Bach

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# Literacy Lava Activity Page

## Homonym Word Play

by Andrea Hazard

Homonyms are words that sound the same but are spelled differently, like ate (consumed food) and eight (the number between 7 and 9). Each of the silly sentences below has two or more homonyms.

See if you can find them!

Sue swims whether the weather is sunny and hot, or snowy and not.

That man does weigh way too much, and will have to wait until he loses weight to fit into those pants.

The hare is bare of hair, but the bear is very hairy.

Tony wants to go too, but he is only two, which is too little.

A gnome from Nome was always cold at home, so he decided to roam and found a warmer home in Rome.



The gnu knew that if he blew the goo on his new shoes it would turn them blue.

When I was little, I didn't know how to spell "no," but now I know.

A flea flew out of the flue to flee the flu.

The Finnish fairy will make sure we pay a fair fare for the ferry as we finish our journey.

Farmer Frank had to sew his overalls so his underwear wouldn't show when he was ready to sow seeds.

Now, make your own silly sentences! Use the homonyms below, or think up your own homonym pairs.

choose (decide); chews (eats)

throne (seat of king); thrown (hurled)

herd (group of animals); heard (detected a sound)

whale (large swimming mammal); wail (moan)

Flo (woman's name); floe (sheet of ice); flow (to move)

moose (large mammal); mousse (chocolate dessert)

Answers: 1. whether, weather 2. weigh, way; wait, weight 3. hare, hair(y); bear, bare 4. to, two, too 5. gnome, Nome; roam, Rome 6. gnu, knew, new; blue, blew 7. know, no 8. flea, flee; flew, flue, flu 9. Finnish, finish; fairy, ferry; fair, fare 10. sew, so, sow.

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**The seventh issue of Literacy Lava was published in December 2010, with information that's timeless!**