In this eighth edition of Literacy Lava, you’ll find ideas for developing plot in Writing Tips for Kids, storytelling as a way to bring literacy front and centre in kids’ lives, how to get kids reading, how different aged siblings share read-aloud time, great tips for a toddler book club, ideas for encouraging creative thinking in children, and how to help kids collect words. As usual, there are nine great free online resources I recommend for reading writing and creating, and the Activity page for kids is a pencil and paper game called Categories.

I hope you’ll have fun with the ideas in Literacy Lava 8, 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?

Do 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.

The Book Chook, editor.

The most dangerous thing in the world is to try to leap a chasm in two jumps. ~David Lloyd George

Literacy Lava Issue 8  March ’11
Contributors to Literacy Lava

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.

Links to Literacy

Dawn Little is the founder of Links to Literacy, an educational consulting company dedicated to providing interactive learning experiences for children and families. In addition, Dawn runs two blogs: Picture This! Teaching with Picture Books where she provides educators and parents with picture book resources to teach reading comprehension and writing strategies, and Literacy Toolbox where she offers tips and tools for educators and parents to enhance the literacy lives of children.

Playing by the Book

Zoe Toft and her two daughters love to play (if not always strictly speaking by the book). Sometimes they make or act out something and they want a good book that continues the theme. Sometimes it’s the other way round and they read a great book which inspires them to get the glue and glitter out. Either way, they’ve always got plenty of books around the house, boxes of “crafty stuff” and the two nearly always end up in some project on the kitchen table. As Zoe says, Playing by the book is all about “reviews of kids’ books and the crazy, fun stuff they inspire us to do”.

Stacey Loscalzo

An experienced reading specialist and speech language pathologist, Stacey Loscalzo is today’s go-to authority for parents who wish to instill a lifelong love of reading in children. The mother of two young daughters, Stacey knows that reading aloud with children puts them on the path to long-term educational success.

Sit a While

Callie Feyen is a freelance writer and mommy of two daughters, Hadley and Harper. She writes on two blogs: “Notes from Naptime” and “Sit a While”. A lover of reading and writing, she likes to combine these interests as she spends time with her children. Her writing has been in Christian School Teacher, Christian Home and School, and the online magazine The Mommy Times.

Getting Kids Reading

Joyce Grant is a freelance journalist and editor. She also blogs about children’s literacy at Getting Kids Reading, which offers fun games, ideas, books, research and practical ideas to help get kids reading. Joyce is the mother of an eight-year-old boy who is a voracious reader, and strongly believes that every child can become a great reader, too.

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.
In this issue of Literacy Lava we’re going to look at how you can use the information you have gathered so far to plot your story - to decide what happens in it.

In Literacy Lava 7 we looked at developing a main character. After doing your character collage you will have some idea of the character’s appearance, where he or she lives and what that person likes doing. You might even know your main character’s friends and how they got to know each other. By now you’ll have some idea of what your main character likes and dislikes.

Story writing is like building a house. You have to have foundations to build it on. With a house the foundations are stumps or a concrete slab. With a story, the foundations are all the things you found out about your character in the collage.

Now you know all this about your character’s background, 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 the plot comes from. Plotting is where you work out what is going to happen in your story. Based on what you know about your characters, you choose a story problem for them. That’s one of the great things about being a writer - you get to decide what happens next.

All plots have a beginning, a middle and an end. To hook your reader, you need something exciting to happen at the start. You need an event or catalyst. Something must change for your character and this is what starts the story in motion.

You’ll also need a couple of obstacles or events along the way to keep the reader turning the pages of your story.
In the next issue of Literacy Lava, I’ll be talking about how to ‘add the cladding’ and develop your plot into a story. I hope you can join me then.
Storytelling: The art of creating and sharing a narrative orally or through writing.

Storytelling has been around for centuries; oral stories were often committed to memory and passed down from generation to generation. Later, people began writing down stories and passing them on. Storytelling is a fun and quick way to bring literacy front and center in our children’s lives.

Benefits of Storytelling

Storytelling can incorporate all components of literacy (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and is therefore extremely beneficial. According to the National Storytelling Network (USA), “Listening to stories is essential to the development of human imagination, creativity, and abstract thought processes.” It’s important that children have the opportunity to not only create their own stories, and share them, but to also hear others tell stories. When children create their own stories, they use the critical thinking skills necessary for advanced reading and writing skills.

Storytelling Around the House

Storytelling with young children doesn’t take much. Children love to tell stories. However, sometimes it’s easier if they have props and other hands-on activities to help prompt them to create a story. Here are a few ways you can use items around your home to guide your children to create stories, both orally or written:

Sensory Writing – Provide an opportunity for children to sit down and listen to a piece of instrumental music (your choice – classical, contemporary, etc.) As they listen to the music, encourage them to write what they feel, think, and imagine. Encourage them to think about what tastes, smells, sights, sounds, and tactile thoughts come to mind when listening.

Grab bags – Get a brown paper bag and fill it with five small items from around your home. Make the items seemingly unrelated (cotton ball, toy car, piece of candy, etc). Give the bag to your child and ask him/her to pull the items out of the bag one by one and use the items to create a story. If you have small children, they may just try to use all of the items in a story without the story making much sense, but if you continue to use this activity sporadically, as they grow older, their stories will begin to become more complex and make more sense.

Picture Box Prompts – Find an old shoe box and decorate the outside of it with magazine pictures, etc. Place old photographs, magazine pictures, and/or pictures from newspapers inside it. If you can, laminate them for longevity. Consider placing headlines and/or specific words from magazines and newspapers as well. Place the box in or around your writing center. Ask your child to pick out three pictures and use the pictures to create a story.

Wordless picture books – Wordless picture books are fantastic resources to have children tell stories. Share a wordless picture book with your children and have them orally tell the story or write their own version of it.

Presenting the Stories

Every storyteller needs an audience. After your children have written stories, provide an opportunity for them to share with the family. Perhaps, once a month, enact a Story Telling Night where family members either orally recite a story or read aloud one they’ve written.

Storytelling provides children with the opportunity to use critical thinking skills to create; and to hone their writing and speaking abilities. If we teach children to become intentional story tellers when they’re young, the benefits will be amazing!

Digital Storytelling is a great way to engage children in writing their own stories. Here are a few options for using technology to encourage and increase children’s story telling abilities:

Wordle – Wordle generates word clouds. Imagine if you provided your child with a question to answer. Perhaps, “Who am I?” Children can share their answer as a story through a word cloud. (see my wordle, below as an example)

Storybird – I first learned of Storybird through The Book Chook and a previous Literacy Lava article. Storybird is a great website that your child can use to create his/her own story using actual author illustrations as inspiration.

Storyjumper – Storyjumper is another website that provides children with an opportunity to create their own story. On this website, however, children can use their art or their own photos and illustrations. Additionally, children can share their stories online (for free) or have them printed into an actual hardback book (for a fee).
What works to get kids reading?

**Reading to your kid every day.** The number-one thing you can do to create a reader.

**Letting him see you read.** Kids do what their parents do. If you don’t enjoy reading - fake it. Or read magazines or comic books or something.

**Surrounding your kid with books.** Access to books gives a kid ownership and once they feel entitled to books they’re more likely to casually pick them up - now and throughout their life.

**Reading extensions.** I’m referring to other media that are associated with certain books - movies, a TV series, cartoons, merchandise - that may interest the child in a book. Who cares what hooks the child into reading? As long as he eventually reads the book, it’s all useful.

**Letting your kid choose what he reads.** Many schools now go by the maxim that “any reading is good reading” and, barring violence or inappropriate content, I agree. If you don’t like his choices, then find something similar that you do approve of. For instance, if he’s reading Superman comics, find him novels with superheroes.

**Treating books like treasures.** Books contain: secrets, surprises, gems, rewards, new friends, adventures, useful facts, gross stuff, silliness and lots of other things your kid values. Let your kid see that a book is something precious and exciting and cool.

**Turning off the TV.** Much as I hate being the bad cop, you’ve gotta, gotta limit screen-time. Create space for reading time. Here’s a GKR article about the reading bubble.

**Sharing books with friends.** The next time your child’s friend is over, casually mention that your kid is reading “…..” book, and ask what they’re reading. Before you know it, the two will be having a conversation about books. And that will reinforce what you’re trying to do in a way that only peers can.

**Letting girls be girls and boys be boys.** Your boy may want to walk around while he reads. Boys need to move, especially when they’re thinking. Your daughter may want to read stuff about dogs and love and celebrities. Girls often gravitate towards books with detailed relationships. (Advice: get your boy an exercise ball to sit on instead of a chair; get your girl a book with an empowered heroine who has sophisticated relationships.)

**Never giving up.** Don’t stop trying to get your kid to read. It’s so important. So, so important. If one thing doesn’t work, try something else. One day it will click and your kid will be a reader. And spend the rest of his or her life thanking you.

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**Don’t want your child reading comics? Try these “superhero” books!**

- **Superhero School** by Aaron Reynolds
- **Perfect Man** by Troy Wilson
- **Atomic Ace (He’s Just My Dad)** by Jeff Weigel
- **Max** by Bob Graham
When I discovered I was pregnant, I immediately pulled *A Time For Bed* by Mem Fox off the shelf and started to read aloud. Caroline grew surrounded by literature. I have pictures of her sitting on mountains of board books, looking at them and teething on them in equal proportion. When I found out I was pregnant for a second time with our daughter Katherine, I again took the now worn version of *A Time for Bed* back out and began to read. As the girls grew, I paid little attention that they, at two different ages, were getting exactly the same diet of literature until Caroline began listening to chapter books. Suddenly, I looked at this bustling toddler beside me and wondered if I was doing her a disservice. My guilt lifted though when I saw my leggy five year old sitting contentedly as I read picture book after picture book to Katherine.

In listening to picture books, Caroline was able to relax into the reading experience. She encountered familiar characters and was reminded of common vocabulary. These experiences caused her to forever equate reading with happiness. She also continued to listen to expressive reading, laying the foundation for her own reading fluency.

And in listening to chapter books, Katherine’s comprehension skills grew and grew. At first, she was antsy and would play around my feet as I read. Eventually, though, she sat for longer spurts of time. Soon she began asking questions about unfamiliar words and eventually making comments that led me to know how well she understood books far above her expected reading and even comprehension level.

Over time, I grew to understand that I was giving my girls a gift. I read to each of them independently and they read to themselves at their own levels. But the gift comes in the time we read together. As we snuggle on the couch reading chapter books and picture books interchangeably, both girls are growing as readers and lovers of literature.

**(photo credit joshp on Flickr)**

**Tips for reading aloud to all:**

- Treat all literature the same way. Snuggle, laugh, read expressively whether you are reading board books or novels.
- Allow smaller children to move and play while you read. They are still listening and growing.
- Share time equally among different types of literature. Children will grow to appreciate what they hear.
- Use reading as an opportunity for siblings to learn about each other’s loves. Choose topics that one may love but the other doesn’t. They will come to appreciate each other.
- Encourage discussion and questions. It is through this opportunity that younger children are able to enjoy books above their level.

**Chapter Books to be enjoyed by all:**

*Anna Hibiscus* by Atinuke  
*The Clementine* series by Sara Pennypacker  
*The Gooney Bird Greene* series by Lois Lowry  
*The Judy Moody* series by Megan McDonald  
*The Pain and the Great One* series by Judy Blume

**Picture Books to be enjoyed by all:**

*Chalk* by Bill Thompson  
*City Dog, Country Frog* by Mo Willems  
*Little Pea* by Amy Rosenthal  
*Pete the Cat* by Eric Litwin  
*Sick Day for Amos McGee* by Philip Stead
Once a month, I host a book club for preschoolers. It is loud, and crazy, and different from any book club I’ve ever participated in. But it is one of my favorite things to do with my two daughters and some friends. All you need is a library card and a bit of imagination and you can start your own. Here are a few tips:

I ask a few questions before I read the story to help the kids focus on the topic we will read about. For example, before we took a look at The Seashore Book by Charolotte Zolotow, I asked the kids to tell me what they know about the beach. On a piece of paper, I wrote down words they associated with the beach: sand, water, rocks, sharks, bathing suits, digging, shovel, etc. It was fun to hear what they had to say, and I think this helps them focus on what we are reading.

When I plan the activities, I try to plan a craft as well as an activity that gets kids moving. The day our group read It’s Fall! By Linda Glaser, we started out making trees from toilet paper rolls and paper plates. The kids took wet cotton balls and dipped them in paint, then dabbed them on paper plates to create some texture for the leaves. While we waited for that project to dry, we went outside on a nature walk to see if we could find some of the things we read about in the story. We collected colored leaves, pinecones and acorns.

I think the most important thing about leading a book club, is that it might not always go as you planned. Sometimes when you’re doing a craft with preschoolers, glue and glitter get everywhere and you spend the rest of the day cleaning sparkles off the floor. But frequently, you’ll find that you’re facilitating a wonderful conversation and listening to how the kids are connecting to the story. One of my favorite memories with my book club is with the book In the Small, Small Pond. Before we read, I told the kids to pay close attention to the frog in the story. At one point one little girl observed that “the frog looks serious” in a picture. I stopped reading and looked at the picture, while the rest of the group leaned in closer.

“Yes, he does look serious.” I agreed and then asked, “How can you tell he’s serious?”

The kids unanimously said that we could tell the frog is serious because of the way his eyes look. We didn’t go on to discuss why the frog might be in a serious mood, or why we ourselves sometimes are serious. I could’ve tried to steer the conversation in that direction, I suppose, but I was reveling in the observation one child made that brought our group a little closer together so that we could take a look at the frog. I was too wrapped up in watching the kids’ faces as they studied the frog, some with burrowed foreheads, some with wide eyes and open mouths.

Having a chance to participate in this is why I do book club; and it’s why I love literature.

Callie Feyen is a freelance writer in Washington DC. You can find more of her writing at http://sit-a-while.blogspot.com.
Teaching children to think creatively is one of the most important gifts we can give them. Surrounding them with other people's creativity in the form of literature, art, media, theatre, and music helps to nurture the creative seed that lives within us all. By encouraging kids to be flexible, imaginative and original, to take risks, ask questions, and improvise, we are giving them a great preparation for whatever they choose to do with their lives.

One way to do this is use creative language when we’re sharing a task, or playing with our kids. An ideal time is after you’ve been reading aloud.

Here are some sample questions you can adapt to help your kids think creatively.

After reading a picture book...
- What are all the reasons the giant might have been sad at the start of the story?
- What if the axe had been blunt? I wonder what might have happened then?
- How could we change this book cover to make it more attractive?
- What would you have done if you’d been the little dog?
- Would there be any problems if we had wings?

When you’re playing with building blocks...
- What if we put this big one on top?
- What could we use this for?
- What would happen if we made this out of jelly?
- Can we make an upside down one?

When you’re waiting somewhere...
- The answer is “red”. What might the question be?
- The answer is “sardine”. What might the question be?
- What are all the different ways we could get home fast?
- What if the sky were pink?
- What does “sad” sound like?

Just as we model reading and writing to our children, I believe we should also show our kids that we love to create. When we write a poem, arrange flowers in a vase, decorate a cake or design a better paper aeroplane, it’s important to share our joy with our children. They witness our delight, and also see us having a go, persevering, concentrating, asking for help, finding answers—all qualities we hope they will emulate.

I believe it’s important too, to give kids permission to be messy somewhere at home. If we can set a space or a room aside where kids can have access to all the (age appropriate) bits and pieces they need, the card, pencils, paints, glue, paper, boxes, cloth, wool, scissors and a working space, then we’ll be encouraging creativity too.

Employers say they want workers who can think outside the box, think creatively. So by encouraging our kids to think that way, we’ll be advancing their job prospects! More importantly though, I believe we’ll be giving them a gift that will bring them lifelong pleasure—the ability to create something that didn’t exist before.

Have you grabbed these free pdfs from my website?

- Literacy in the Playground - a compilation of skipping games and chants, great for family fun and fitness!
- The Book Chook Cook Book - tried and true recipes from writers and bloggers across the world.
- Literacy Lava 1 to Literacy Lava 7 - each issue of Literacy Lava is available from the archive at my website.
Do your children like to collect things? I know my two do - whether it’s conkers, stones and sticks or plastic ponies and erasers, collecting is fun. Here are some ways you can draw on this delight in acquisition to help your kids create their own anthology of words.

Often, when explorers go off in search of new specimens to bring back, they venture out into the wide world. So a first word-collecting expedition could involve walking around the streets near your home collecting words you find on road signs, in window displays, on walls or even on adverts. Take a camera that your kid can use so they can document the words they stumble across - a camera will make them feel grown up and doubly keen to find the next word for their collection.

When we tried this I quickly became aware of how my daughter enjoyed learning and reading on the move (rather than sat still in front of a book). She was learning things to help her navigate her own world - signs such as those pointing to her school, words painted on roads showing which way to look for oncoming traffic, as well as safety signs in shops such as “Fire exit”.

Searching for words and phrases doesn’t just have to take place out in the wild - you can also have a word hunt around home. Arm your kid with something fun to write on (for example post it notes or blank stickers) and challenge them to find and write down 5 words in each room in the house, the only rule being that they mustn’t look for words in books. Perhaps they’ll find words on food packaging, boxes, electrical equipment, pictures or even clothing!

Once again reading whilst actively exploring made this literacy project fun for my daughter. It also showed her how words really are everywhere - even in places that we overlook because we’re so familiar with them.

A third way to acquire more words for the collection is through listening out for ones that catch your kids’ attention. If you and your kids enjoy a little bit of subterfuge you could head to a cafe and ask your children to listen in on the conversations around them, choosing words they like to add to their collection. Again I suggest providing something fun to record the words on - perhaps postcards, a special notebook or even a Dictaphone.

Because listening closely and spelling were also involved in this challenge it was perhaps the hardest method of collection, but my girls loved getting to eat chocolate cake at the same time as learning some more literacy. (Who wouldn’t?) They also relished having a secret mission. Obviously in a cafe you need to be a little discreet about what you’re doing, but in our case this made for a very civilised afternoon tea where my girls sat remarkably still and yet had lots of fun.

Finally, once you’ve amassed a wonderful collection of words it’s time to display them. Create a gallery or museum to show off the words your kids have found and selected. In the process they’ll re-read all the words and re-visit the adventures you’ve had together whilst collecting them. In our case my daughter cut out words from the photos she’d taken and stuck them on card, then she added the words collected around the house on card and from conversations on post-it notes. Altogether they made a great display on the wall - and reminded us that fun (and useful!) reading can happen anywhere, anytime.

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**Recommended Picture Books**

*Max’s Words* by Kate Banks, illustrated by Boris Kulikov  
*The Boy Who Loved Words* by Roni Schotter, illustrated by Giselle Potter  

Great picture books about collecting include:  
*Prudy’s Problem and How She Solved It* by Carey Armstrong-Ellis  
*Hannah’s Collections* by Marthe Jocelyn  
*The Room of Wonders* by Sergio Ruzzier  

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

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<td>1 Storynory: classic and original tales for children to read online or download as MP3</td>
<td>4 Find tips for young writers at Christine Harris’s website.</td>
<td>7 Directions to make your own pom-pom Shaun the Sheep.</td>
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<td>2 So much to read and do at National Geographic Little Kids.</td>
<td>5 Writing prompts for kids from Glen and Karen Bledsoe.</td>
<td>8 Create music and play at The Isle of Tune.</td>
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<td>3 Find cute phonics-based videos at Mr Thorne Does Phonics.</td>
<td>6 Create a comic online at the BBC’s Digger and the Gang.</td>
<td>9 Find games for toddlers at Owlieboo.</td>
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The most effective kind of education is that a child should play amongst lovely things.” ~Plato

~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!
Have you heard of the game Categories? Maybe you know the board game Scattergories? It’s based on this game.

In Categories, all you need to do is to write some letters of the alphabet down the left side of your grid, and write some groups of things across the top of the grid. I’ve given you some categories and letters to get you started, and two possible answers, or you can choose different ones.

Get someone to time you and see how quickly you can fill in each cell of the grid. Or try this great online timer and set a time for yourself.

You can also play this with a friend, or parent, and give each other letters and categories of things to try. If you’re up for a challenge, you could try each letter of the alphabet. Good luck!

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