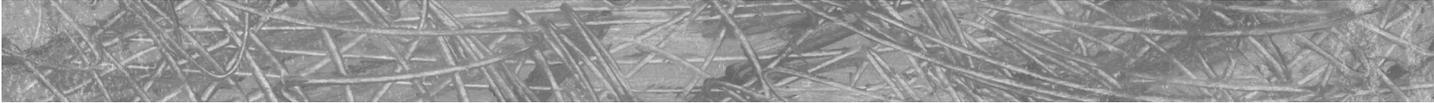


# Mixed-Ages Programming



The Very Ready Reading Program includes three manuals: ages birth to 24 months, ages two to three years, and ages four to five years. All storytimes, books, and introductory materials are developmentally appropriate for the ages given. However, it is not always possible for libraries to hold individual developmentally appropriate programs, and an alternative is to hold storytimes for children ages birth to age five. There are also other reasons some libraries consider holding mixed-ages programming in addition to developmentally appropriate programming.

## Why Mixed Ages?

Although it is ideal to provide library programs that are developmentally appropriate to the various ages and stages of young children, that is not always possible for several reasons. Parents who have children of varying ages often cannot or do not want to attend two or three different storytimes based on the ages of their children. They are limited on time, and although they might enjoy having a library experience, they would prefer that the entire family can attend together. Due to busy family schedules, parents may have time constraints and can only find time to come to one program. The idea of having a family experience with all children together may be more appealing. Moreover, some librarians may not have the time to offer several programs each week, and staff may be limited, so a mixed-ages program is all they are able to offer.

## Challenges

When you have a group of children of varying ages, the room may be noisier and the group as a whole may be more active. If it is possible to have an assistant help during the program, it should keep chaos to a minimum. A senior volunteer, an education student, or an intern may be asked to assist.

Mixed-ages programming may require more time for planning—you want to try to have rhymes, songs, and activities that can be enjoyed by all ages in some capacity. Once you have planned such programs, keep records so you can use the programs again in the future.

Finally, you may need to cap the number of families that can attend, as each family may have several members who want to attend, and space limitations may allow only a certain number of people in the room. If this happens, try to offer more than one program, or if holding a series of programs, limit the number and repeat the series with different attendees.

## Tips on Book Selection for Mixed-Ages Storytimes

- Select books with bright colors and appealing covers. Subjects should be ones that are familiar to the world of young children.
- Pick books that have large illustrations where objects are very distinct and are closely linked to the text.
- Choose books that contain only a few sentences on each page and are not as lengthy as a book you might share with a four- or five-year-old child.
- Share predictable books (repeating sentences, rhyming words, or recurring words) so that children who can speak can participate by joining in or making motions.
- Pick texts that contain sounds or a rhythmic beat.
- Share song picture books as they appeal to all ages of children.
- Pick some books with humorous texts—if older children are laughing or are happy, it will have an effect on the younger children.

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- Share concept books (numbers, letters, shapes, etc.), not to teach the concepts, but rather for enjoyment and exposure to the concepts.
- Use a combination of books that have universal appeal and that are at various “listening” levels.
- Share books that show children of varying ages and different ethnic backgrounds.
- Pick books you like and share them enthusiastically! Use different voices and sounds.
- At the conclusion of storytime, show or provide a list of recommended books to adults, particularly if you have a theme, that are appropriate for different age levels: board books for babies, simple texts with one or two sentences for ages two and three, longer texts for ages four and five.

### Sample Books for Mixed-Ages Storytimes

- Alborough, Jez. *Duck in the Truck*. HarperCollins, 2000.
- Allen, Pamela. *Who Sank the Boat?* Puffin, 1996.
- Aylesworth, Jim. *Old Black Fly*. Henry Holt, 1992.
- Baker, Keith. *Big Fat Hen*. Harcourt Brace, 1994.
- Beaumont, Karen. *I Ain't Gonna Paint No More!* Harcourt, 2005.
- Beaumont, Karen. *Who Ate All the Cookie Dough?* Henry Holt, 2008.
- Beaumont, Karen. *No Sleep for the Sheep*. Harcourt, 2011.
- Brown, Margaret Wise. *Goodnight Moon*. HarperCollins, reissued 1991.
- Burris, Priscilla. *Five Green and Speckled Frogs*. Scholastic, 2003.
- Cabrera, Jane. *Over in the Meadow*. Holiday House, 1999.
- Cabrera, Jane. *The Wheels on the Bus*. Holiday House, 2011.
- Carle, Eric. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Philomel, 1981.
- Carle, Eric. *The Very Busy Spider*. Philomel, 1985.
- Carle, Eric. *Today is Monday*. Philomel, 1993.
- Christelow, Eileen. *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. Clarion, 1998.
- Church, Caroline Jayne. *Do Your Ears Hang Low?* Chicken House, 2002.
- Craig, Lindsey. *Dancing Feet!* Knopf, 2010.
- Craig, Lindsey. *Farmyard Beat*. Knopf, 2011.
- Dewdney, Anna. *Llama Llama Home with Mama*. Viking, 2011.
- Dodd, Emma. *Dog's Colorful Day*. Dutton, 2003.
- Durango, Julia. *Cha-Cha Chimps*. Simon & Schuster, 2006.
- Faulkner, Keith. *Do You Have My Quack?* Cartwheel, 2001.
- Feiffer, Jules. *Bark, George*. HarperCollins, 1999.
- Fleming, Denise. *Barnyard Banter*. Square Fish, 1997.
- Fleming, Denise. *Mama Cat Has Three Kittens*. Henry Holt, 1998.
- Fox, Mem. *Time for Bed*. Harcourt, 2005.
- Galdone, Paul. *Cat Goes Fiddle-i-fee*. Clarion, 1985.
- Guarino, Deborah. *Is Your Mama a Llama?* Scholastic, 1991.
- Harley, Bill. *Sitting Down to Eat*. August House, 2005.
- Hillenbrand, Will. *Off We Go! A Bear and Mole Story*. Holiday House, 2013. (Several others in series)

- Horáček, Petr. *Butterfly Butterfly*. Candlewick, 2007.
- Hort, Lenny. *The Seals on the Bus*. Henry Holt, 2000.
- Javernick, Ellen. *The Birthday Pet*. Marshall Cavendish, 2009.
- Kalan, Robert. *Blue Sea*. Greenwillow, 1992.
- Kalan, Robert. *Jump, Frog, Jump!* William Morrow, 1995.
- Katz, Karen. *The Babies on the Bus*. Henry Holt, 2011.
- Kutner, Merrily. *Down on the Farm*. Holiday House, 2009.
- Lewis, Kevin. *My Truck is Stuck!* Hyperion, 2002.
- Lithgow, John. *I Got Two Dogs*. Simon & Schuster, 2008.
- Litwin, Eric. *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes*. HarperCollins, 2010. (Several others in series)
- Martin Jr., Bill. *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* Henry Holt, 1992.
- Martin Jr., Bill. *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. Anniversary edition. Beach Lane, 2009.
- Paxton, Tom. *Going to the Zoo*. William Morrow, 1996.
- Root, Phyllis. *Rattletrap Car*. Candlewick, 2004.
- Rosen, Michael. *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. Margaret K. McElderry, 2009.
- Sayre, April Pulley. *If You're Hoppy*. Greenwillow, 2011.
- Sedaka, Neil. *Waking Up Is Hard to Do*. Imagine, 2010.
- Shaw, Nancy. *Sheep in a Jeep*. Houghton Mifflin, 1986.
- Shea, Bob. *Dinosaur vs. the Library*. Disney-Hyperion, 2011.
- Taback, Simms. *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*. Viking, 1997.
- Tafuri, Nancy. *Busy Little Squirrel*. Simon & Schuster, 2007. (Several others by this author)
- Thomas, Jan. *Rhyming Dust Bunnies*. Beach Lane, 2009.
- Thomas, Jan. *Is Everyone Ready for Fun?* Beach Lane, 2011.
- Thomson, Pat. *Drat that Fat Cat!* Scholastic, 2003.
- Van Fleet, Matthew. *Cat*. Simon & Schuster, 2009. Also, *Dog*.
- Whippo, Walt. *Little White Duck*. Little Brown, 2000.
- Willems, Mo. *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*. Hyperion, 2003. (Several others in series)
- Wilson, Karma. *Bear Snores On*. Margaret K. McElderry, 2002. (Several others in series)
- Wilson, Karma. *Cow Loves Cookies*. Margaret K. McElderry, 2010.
- Wood, Audrey. *The Napping House*. Harcourt, 2005.
- Yolen, Jane. *How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* Blue Sky Press, 2000. (Several others in series)

### Same Book Title, Different Ages

Different, age-appropriate versions of the same song or book title may be published by different publishers. Two examples are below. In a mixed-ages storytime, you could share either the version appropriate for twos and threes or the version for fours and fives, and then show adults the different versions that are available and that you would recommend for different ages.

#### Example 1

- Cabrera, Jane. *If You're Happy and You Know It*. Holiday, 2005. (Most appropriate for fours and fives)
- Carter, David. *If You're Happy and You Know It*. Cartwheel, 2007. (Most appropriate for twos and threes)

- Kubler, Annie. *If You're Happy and You Know It*. Child's Play, 2001. (Most appropriate for babies and toddlers)
- Warhola, James. *If You're Happy and You Know It*. Orchard, 2007. (Most appropriate for fours and fives)

### Example 2

- Cabrera, Jane. *The Wheels on the Bus*. Holiday House, 2011. (Most appropriate for twos and threes; could also be used with fours and fives)
- Katz, Karen. *The Babies on the Bus*. Henry Holt, 2011. (Most appropriate for babies and toddlers)
- Zelinsky, Paul. *The Wheels on the Bus*. Dutton, 1990. (Most appropriate for twos and threes; could also be used with fours and fives)

## Age-Appropriate Books for a Theme

You can also share a book on a certain theme and then recommend different, age-appropriate books on that theme. The examples below are of trains and farm animals.

### Example 1

- Crews, Donald. *Freight Train*. Greenwillow, 1993. (Most appropriate for toddlers and twos)
- London, Jonathan. *A Train Goes Clickety-Clack*. Henry Holt, 2007. (Most appropriate for twos and threes)
- Piper, Watty. *Little Engine That Could*. Grosset & Dunlap, 1990. (Most appropriate for fours and fives)

### Example 2

- Froeb, Lori C. *Farm! A Big Fold-out Book About Colors*. Reader's Digest, 2008. (Most appropriate for toddlers and twos)
- Kutner, Merrily. *Down on the Farm*. Holiday House, 2009. (Most appropriate for fours and fives)

- Minor, Wendell. *My Farm Friends*. Putnam, 2011. (Most appropriate for twos and threes)

## Tips for Running a Mixed-Ages Storytime

- Caregivers should attend and participate in all activities and help their babies, toddlers, or two-year-olds act out the rhymes and actions.
- Share nursery rhymes, songs, and simple finger rhymes and repeat them—young children enjoy repetition.
- Use a lot of music—all ages (especially babies) enjoy music. Consider using more “live voice” singing than recordings. On many recordings, the singing is at a fast tempo. With live voice, you can slow it down so children can easily hear the syllables (good for phonological awareness).
- Include creative dramatics, props, and puppets—but not scary ones. Very young children will think puppets are real.
- Young children do not have the fine motor skills to do the same fingerplays as older preschoolers do, so adults need to help. The best idea is to choose finger rhymes that use basic movements like opening and closing hands, pointing to various fingers in countdown rhymes, or using the whole arm in motions.
- Choose fingerplays, rhymes, stretches, and songs that will have interest for various developmental levels and/or let adults know how each age child can participate.
- Be prepared for chaos! Expect the unexpected. Some babies and toddlers will watch and listen only, some will participate, and some may appear to pay little attention. Walkers may attempt to wander around the room.
- Mixed-ages storytimes can be thematically arranged; however, if you do select a theme, make sure that every activity/book related to that theme is developmentally appropriate for all ages in some way.

- Adults usually sit in a large semicircle with their children in front of them or on their lap. Make sure no adults are blocking other children's views.
- Because children of these various ages are active, use short age-appropriate stories and quick activities that allow for a lot of movement. Also allow for a lot of participation at various levels.
- When offering a series of programs, repeat some activities/songs from week to week.

### Suggested Template

- Opening song or rhyme. Use same opener every week.
- Book appropriate for mixed-ages group. Use longest story first.
- Any combination of two activities: fingerplay, rhyme, song, creative dramatics, or stretch.
- Book appropriate for mixed-ages group. Make sure children can participate in some manner.
- Any combination of two activities: fingerplay, rhyme, song, creative dramatics, or stretch. Make sure one activity gets older children up and moving.
- Book appropriate for mixed-ages group. Use a visual story or prop.
- One activity: fingerplay, rhyme, song, or creative dramatic.
- Closing song or rhyme. Use same closer every week.
- Share Time—open-ended art, music, or other hands-on activity. May provide educational toys for playtime for babies.

This is just a suggested template. You may develop other models once you are comfortable doing mixed-ages programs. Also, if most children are restless, you may skip one book or activity.

Always provide a sheet of activities used that day for caregivers to take home and use with children. Have a display of appropriate books for the

various age levels for parents to check-out or provide booklists for suggestions. Include early literacy tips based on the 7 Days, 7 Ways principles.

### Tips for Using Music in a Mixed-Ages Storytime

- Keep songs short (possibly a few less verses than what you would use with a group of fours and fives) and within their voice range (one octave at the most or small range).
- Use familiar songs and repeat them often.
- Sing songs just a little slower than on a recording.
- Emphasize syllables of words (helps with phonological awareness skills).
- Participation in songs should be voluntary.
- Include movement or motions with songs.
- Movement and motions may be different for fours and fives than what babies and toddlers and twos and threes might do. Explain the variations before doing the song.
- Echo songs are especially great for young children.

### Sample Music Activities For Mixed-Ages Groups

- Let babies and toddlers play or shake a simple instrument to music, such as a maraca or rattle. The adult can help. Or have the youngest use wrist/ankle bells (jingle bells on yarn). Have older children play simple musical instruments.
- Have the adults hold their babies and dance with them for movement. Older children can do the movements on their own.
- Have older children move to music or play with scarves, rainbow ribbon sticks, or streamers. Adults can play peek-a-boo with a scarf with babies.
- For babies, tap in time to the music on the bottom of their feet or on their hands.

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Holding their ankles, tap babies' feet together; holding their wrists, move their arms to the beat (up and down, in and out) or touch their ankles with their wrists. You can also move babies' legs to the beat in a bicycle motion.

- Provide simple rhythm or lummi sticks for older children to keep the beat.
- Rock babies back and forth to music if older children are doing more complicated movements.
- Clap on babies' palms while reciting a rhyme or song. Toddlers can clap their hands on adults' palms. Older children can clap their hands as if playing a drum (hold one hand open with palm facing up, then use two fingers of other hand to tap on "drum" like drumsticks).
- Play musical lap games and bounce games for the youngest, and musical games or movement activities for older children.
- Provide an egg shaker for all ages.
- Provide colorful bean bags for all ages and use bean-bag musical songs. Adults can help babies move the bean bags. Use shakers, bean bags, and bells with simple movements (high above head; tap knees, feet, or tummy; hide behind back, etc.).
- Use a parachute with musical games (for bouncing a stuffed animal). Adults can raise babies up and down along with the movements of the stuffed animal.

- Adults can help make shakers by filling small empty water bottles with beans. Make sure lids are attached firmly. All ages can shake these.
- Attach brightly colored ribbons to the screw band of canning jars. Have children wave them along with music.
- Children hold on to a hula hoop while walking in a circle to music. Parents with babies can either hold on to the hula hoop or walk around in a circle.

Following are some sample programs and adjustments that would be made for a mixed-ages story-time group.