

Picture Perfect GIFT BOOKS

By Linda Sattgast

Picture Perfect Gift Books—Learning Books

Children are lean mean learning machines! It's amazing how much knowledge they accumulate in such a short period of time. I wish I had that same propensity now!

In this section we'll focus on books that teach a child specific kinds of knowledge. Of course, everything they're learning is knowledge, but I'm talking about concepts that are important for learning to read and accumulating facts about subjects they'll eventually study at school.

This gives them an edge when they start school—they won't have to learn everything from scratch, and they'll be more excited about learning in general.

Lesson 06-01: Alphabet Book

An alphabet book is a fun book to make and fun to read to a child. You can read an alphabet book to a child at a very early age, and he or she will enjoy it. Think of it: alphabet books have simple pictures and very few words—usually one word per picture, to be exact, so that's a good speed for really young kids.

Our son knew the entire alphabet at 18 months of age, and we weren't even trying that hard. We simply read alphabet books to him and pointed at the letters as we said them. Pretty soon he began to recognize letters in other places, like signs along the road or lettering on cardboard boxes.

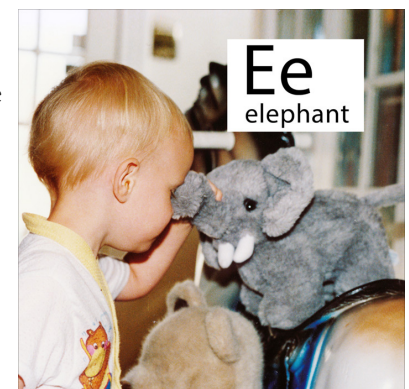
For his second birthday, we gave Caleb a magnetic alphabet set. We have a video of him opening his present and saying every letter correctly—although he called W “double-boo,” which I thought was so cute! Not every child will learn letters this fast—our daughter didn't, but she still became a voracious reader and to this day reads more books than anyone I've ever met in my life.

When you pair alphabet items with photos of your child, you create a very special personalized book. They get to participate in the learning of the alphabet. How fun!

I'm using Myriad Pro Regular for the font, which is a sans serif font. A serif font has extra little projections on the letters that give it a fancier look. Most adult books use a serif font like this, but children's books can use either style.

For my ABC page examples, I'll be using the sans serif font Myriad Pro.

As much as possible, try to feature objects that are special to the child as you create your book. This will make it more interesting for them. Our son's favorite toy for awhile was a stuffed elephant. He loved his elephant, as he called it, and he took it to bed with him every night. We managed to capture this photo of him giving his elephant a love bump.



When I use this photo as a full bleed background for an alphabet page, I run into a problem with the letters. It's a problem you may run into as well. The letters don't fit on the left over his head, and on the right they don't show up very well. There are several ways to solve this problem.

- You can put a white mat behind the letters.
- You can also change the color of the letters to make them stand out. I also left a hint of the mat at 20% opacity.
- Another alternative is to make the photo smaller. I put a simple black stroke layer style around the photo to define the boundaries better. It might even be nice to vary between full bleed and a single photo like this throughout the book.

Sometimes you can get a great photo of your child and the alphabet object, but it may be hard to get a good photo for every page of your book with every letter of the alphabet—especially if you have a squirmy and active little one. So consider doing some letters with the child in the picture and do other letters with just the alphabet object.

A good mix of with and without the child will work just as well—especially if the items are familiar to the child—and it'll be much easier on you! It also adds some variation to the book.

If you illustrate the entire alphabet with one letter per page, it's going to take 28 pages, counting a title page and end page, and that's a manageable size of book.

If you have trouble coming up with ideas to go with a letter, get out the dictionary and glance through the pages for ideas. Or try a children's dictionary, which you can find at the library.

Regarding images, it's possible to find images online for items you may not have in your home, such as a xylophone for the letter X, or you can simply purchase an inexpensive toy Xylophone for the child to make it more personal.

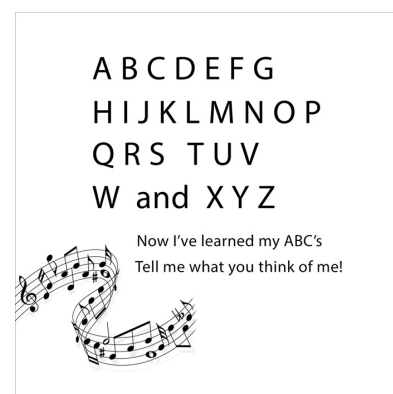
You could also turn the alphabet book into an adventure by going places with the child to capture photos—places like the zoo to take pictures of a zebra for the letter Z. And that actually makes the photo more memorable for the child.

You need to be realistic, though. It's up to you how much time and effort you want to spend, or are able to spend, creating an alphabet book. If you don't have a lot of time or energy, it's not a big deal if some of the items aren't a personal toy of the child.

Could you use Z for zucchini instead of a zebra? Of course! Don't get hung up on having to do something just right. Your child will love the book, no matter what you do!

And finally, consider placing the alphabet song on the last page, which is a single page on the left side, so it's a perfect place for the song. I found the curly bar of music on a stock photo site, but there are musical note shapes in Photoshop or Photoshop Elements that you could use just as well.

When you're done reading the alphabet book to the child, sing this song while clapping your hands to the beat, and he or she will love it!



Lesson 06-02: More Alphabet Ideas

In this video I'll show you three outside-the-box ideas for alphabet books. We'll look at one idea for really young children and two ideas for slightly older children that give them a little more of a challenge!

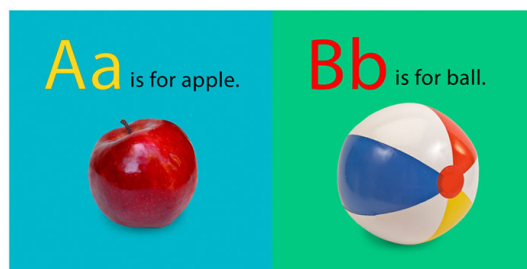
I Love You Alphabet Book

For young children ages 0 to 18 months, make a shorter version of an alphabet book that only goes to the letter I and has a twist at the end. This would work well as a small 6x6 board book.

Start with A as usual and try to keep each alphabet item very simple. It could be something familiar to the child or not. At a really young age the act of reading while holding the child is more important than familiarity with the subject matter.

Make the image nice and big, along with the letters. And use really bright primary colors.

Here's what the pages look like together in a two-page spread.



If you're skilled enough, you can select the item out of the photo and place it on a bright background as I did here, but if you don't know how to do that, your book can look just as good using other methods,.

For D I simply put a photo on a bright background.

With C is for Cat I used a more advanced technique called Out of Bounds where part of the object appears to be escaping the bounds of the photo. The purpose of this class is not to teach you all the possible techniques out there, but if you already know how to do this technique, it can be fun!

Most of all, just do something simple and colorful, and you can't go wrong! Keep going through the letters of the alphabet until you get to the letter I. And this is where you have the twist.

On the last spread of the book, instead of using an object, say, "And I stands for I love you!" so that's the twist at the end. Be sure to give the child a hug and a kiss when you get to this page!

This doesn't have to be the parents hugging their child, though that would make a great gift for parents! It could be grandma and grandpa hugging the child or just one person, an aunt or grandmother— whoever makes the book gets to decide who is featured in the end!



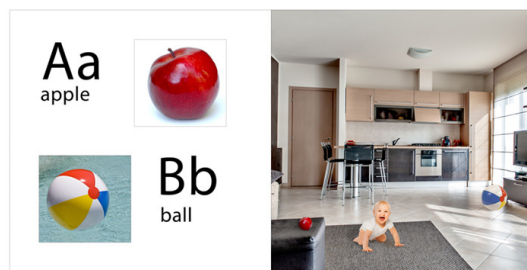
Hide And Seek Alphabet

This involves some hide and seek, which kids adore doing:

Use two letters per spread, but put them both on the left page.

Then take a photo of the two alphabet items in one of the rooms in your home, and place it on the right hand page of the spread.

Here's how it would look: Use a different room or location for each photo, even places like the yard or a nearby park, and include the two items in the photo. Don't make them too obvious, but still easy enough to find. The child can be in the photograph as well for an added bonus.



Initially you'll need to prompt the child to look for the objects, but he or she will soon catch on and begin to look without you telling them to. So not only does the child learn the letters of the alphabet, they also enjoy playing the game of hide and seek.

The older the age of the child, the harder you can make it to find the object. Perhaps for older children closer to kindergarten you might want to place a number of other objects in the same room to make it harder to find the alphabet objects.

As a bonus, this kind of book is a snapshot of the child's home. Both Charlie and I wish we had good pictures of the home we first lived in, so this book would become a record of the various rooms in the house.

Alphabet Detective

This is a really fun way to help a child learn the sounds of the letters, especially if they're struggling with the concept of letters or reading in school.

For each letter of the alphabet, photograph several items in a group with at least one item that begins with the letter you're featuring. Here, for example, the child must figure out which toy starts with a "b." If he or she can say bear, that's great.

If they have trouble, the reader should say the names of the objects out loud or have the child say them and try to pick the one with the B sound. It will help the child connect the beginning sound of the word with a letter of the alphabet.

There are other variations of an alphabet hunt you could do, but this is a good start.

By the way, there are some great websites that list nouns that start with a particular letter. Type "nouns that begin with ____" and then the letter you want into a search engine to find these websites. For some this will be easier than going through a dictionary.

So there you have three additional alphabet ideas from which to pick OR you may already have your own spin on an alphabet book. If so, go for it!

Lesson 06-03: Toddler Learning Books

There are so many things a child needs to learn! In this video we'll explore additional concepts young children can learn using personalized books.

Eyes, Nose, Ears, and Toes

Make a short board book about parts of the body for a younger child who is just beginning to interact with books. Help them learn the names of the parts of the body—with a picture of them!

Take closeup photos of the child to pair with the following sentences substituting the name of your child or grandchild:

Annabell's eyes.
Annabell's nose
Annabell's mouth
Annabell's ears.
Annabell's arm.
Annabell's hands.
Annabell's fingers.
Annabell's legs.
Annabell's feet.
Annabell's toes.
Shhhh.
Annabell is sleeping.

Annabell's eyes.
Annabell's nose.
Annabell's ears.
Annabell's mouth.



Color Me Cute

Take photos of the child's clothing, one piece of clothing at a time. I like the idea of hanging the clothes with colorful clothespins on a line in front of a white background, but a simpler idea is to spread a white sheet on the floor in a well lighted spot and photograph each item of clothing separately.

Choose clothing of different colors such as:

- A red shirt.
- Blue pants.
- Yellow socks.

You may not be able to find a piece of clothing for all the main colors, so feel free to use a toy like a brown stuffed bear instead.

The final photo would be of the child dressed in the clothes with any items you used in the photo shoot next to him or her.

Here is example copy:

Andy has a red shirt.

Andy has blue pants.

Andy has yellow socks.

Andy has a brown bear

Andy has a white T-shirt.

Andy has a green cap.

Andy is wearing his colors!



Opposites

This would be a short board book for very young children. Include the child in some of the examples.

- Tall vs Short (Could be Dad and child or Mommy and child)
- Big Little (big ball and small ball)
- Wet Dry (in the bath tub, swathed in a towel)
- Old Young (Grandparent, child)
- Hard Soft (floor, bed)
- Light Dark (The Lamp on next to bed, and then the lamp off)

and the word Goodnight!

Up and Over

This book idea teaches directional words.

I based this on a set of little books I wrote called the Lost & Found Parables. The story uses directional words such as UP, OVER, UNDER, etc.

You can do the same using pictures of your child to illustrate the book. For example, you could say,

Tyler crawls UP the steps.

Jasmine hides BEHIND the umbrella. etc.

Here are some other possibilities:

I run OUTSIDE to play.

I walk ALONG the path.
I swing UP in the air.
I go DOWN the stairs.
I sit UNDER the table.
I step OVER my toy car.
I sit ON the chair.
I hide BEHIND the couch.
I jump THROUGH the hula hoop.
I run ACROSS the grass.
I climb INTO my bed. Goodnight!

Feel free to use your own ideas!

Jared Counts

Teach the numbers one to ten with items belonging to the child or items that are familiar, e.g.

Jared has one big dump truck.
Jared has two block houses.
Jared has three.... etc.

When you get to 10, take a photo of the child with his two hands up in front of him for the last page.

Jared has 10 fingers.
Can you count them?

Harriet's Blue Hat

Teach colors by showing items belonging to the child or items familiar to the child, e.g.

Harriet has a blue hat.
Harriet has pink boots.
Etc.

Loud and Quiet

Show places where the child can be loud or quiet and simply pair the word "Loud" or "Quiet" with the appropriate photo. Some examples are:

Playtime
Grocery store
Swing
Church
Playground
Yard

End with Bedtime:
Shhhh. It's time to sleep.

Use a loud or quiet voice as appropriate when you read this book to the child.

Summer Winter Spring Fall

If your location has distinct seasons, make one book about the child each season for a set of four little books. Each season you can chronicle things the child does in that season. Here are some examples:

Spring

It's spring!

The purple crocuses bloom.

Yellow daffodils grow tall.

The tree gets new leaves.

Fido and I go for a walk.

In the spring it rains.

I put on my boots and play in the puddles. Etc.

A satisfying ending could be:

I like the spring! (show a fun photo of the child doing a spring activity)

Repeat for summer, fall, and winter. If you create a book for all four seasons, it will be a great documentary of a year in the life of a child!

So there you have some fun ideas for making learning books for toddlers.

Lesson 06-04: Ready for School

In this video we'll talk about learning books that help children who are approaching school age gain specific knowledge that will help them in school.

For book ideas, ask yourself the question: What is interesting to my child or grandchild?

My son was interested in toy cars—which is pretty typical of boys. He had quite a collection of Matchbox toy cars. Thankfully they were cheap. Back then they cost about \$1 apiece, or even less on sale.

When my son went to bed, he took his cars with him. He played with these cars for several years. His cars had names and he made up stories about them.

We'll talk about imaginative stories in another section, but for this section on learning, how could I turn his fascination with cars into a learning experience culminating in a book that would be interesting to my son?

How about categorizing the cars into different kinds of vehicles with a description of what each category of vehicle does? For example:

- trucks
- service cars like ambulances and buses
- race cars
- regular cars
- vans, etc.

Just for fun we could feature his favorite vehicle in each category. Do you see how that just became a learning book?

It helps him gain more knowledge about a subject he's already interested in.

Here are some other ideas:

Art

Collect the best paintings from a child who loves to draw. Have her tell you what the painting is about so you can make a notation in the book, and be sure to add the date. You can encourage her to learn to draw new kinds of things, and she'll love seeing her paintings featured so beautifully!

Legos

Does your child love Legos? Work with him to create different kinds of objects and photograph them to put in a book. Let him explain what he made and use his words as journaling in the book. This will motivate him to become more creative.

Recipes

A lot of children, both boys and girls, love to help Mom or Dad or Grandma in the kitchen. Search out recipes that are easy for children to make and create a recipe book for them, including pictures of them baking or cooking, and of the final dish or dessert.

Zoo Animals

How can you turn a trip to the zoo into a learning experience? How about taking pictures of familiar and unfamiliar animals that you can put in a book, and also include photos of your child at the zoo. Be sure to jot down the names of animals you don't know yourself so you can identify them later when you make a book about the animals. If he learns the name of a ring-tailed lemur, for example, he's more likely to remember it because of his Zoo learning book.

Just remember: anything your child or grandchild is interested in can become the topic of a learning book.

Lesson 06-05: Learning to Read

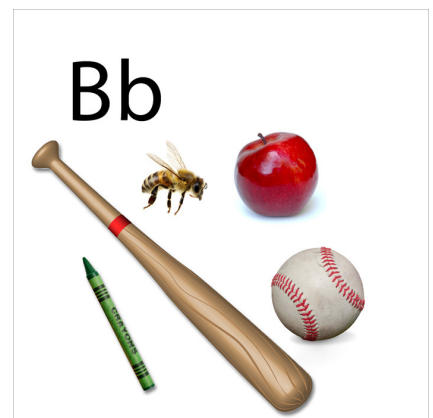
Reading opens up a whole new world for children! In this video we'll talk about ways to help children learn to read by creating personalized readers for them.

A big key is to involve the child in creating the book. When it's *their* book, they're much more likely to want to read it.

You don't have to be a school teacher to do this. I wasn't formally trained as a school teacher, but whenever my kids encountered a stumbling block in school, I would put my mind to work to come up with creative ways to solve the problem.

Whether kids are in private school, public school, or homeschool, the biggest factor in their favor is parents and grandparents who care and are involved in helping them succeed.

- If the child is struggling to learn to read, figure out whether he really knows the sounds that are made by the alphabet. If he doesn't, concentrate on that first, with an alphabet book. In my alphabet sample, not all the objects begin with the letter B. There's a reason for that. This alphabet book is more of a game.
- First of all, I would show him how to trace around the capital B and little b with his pointer finger as he says the sound that B makes. You do it first, and then have him do it. This will help create a connection between the sound and the letter.
- Then make it fun—make it a game. Have him say the name of each object on the page and tell you whether he thinks it starts with a b or not. Be patient if he gets it wrong. Make a big deal about it when he gets it right—maybe give him a star and let him earn points toward something he wants.
- Keep your learning sessions short and do something fun when it's over—something *he* wants to do.
- Once he's comfortable with sounds, move on to simple words and ultra simple stories. The stories don't have to be stellar.



I still remember my first grade readers, the Dick and Jane books! (I know. That dates me.) But they were so simple:

Run, Dick, run!

See Dick run.

Dick runs and runs.

So make your book that simple—or simpler. You don't even need a sentence. You can start with one word per page.

- Have the child help make the book. Let him decide who the subject of the book will be—perhaps himself or one of his favorite toys. Since my son loved cars, it would be logical to use one of his cars as the subject for a book. “Run, Car, run. See Car run!”
- If you can, look at your child's school reader to get an idea of words he needs to learn and make simple sentences using those words. You can also look online for resources. I typed “easy words to read” into a search engine and came up with some amazing resources, including an article called *100 Words for Beginning Readers* that also gave some great suggestions for helping kids learn! I wish I'd had that when my kids were little!
- Let the child decide how to illustrate the book. With one reader I made, my son illustrated it with his own very primitive drawings, and he loved it! Or you can work with your child to take photos to illustrate the book. The key is to let him be involved in the process so he feels ownership—like it's *his* book!
- Make it into a real book with a cover. It can be a homemade book or you can order one printed online, but it will be very exciting for him to have his very own book that he made himself. He's much more likely to want to actually read it. And just the process of making the book will help him learn the words.

I don't claim to be an expert teacher, so do check with the child's teacher for input and help. But don't underestimate your power and ability to help your child. If you're the parent, you probably know him better than just about anyone on earth. You know what motivates him and what demotivates him. You can give him specialized attention that a teacher often cannot give simply due to the sheer number of students in the class. Grandparents can also be a wonderful resource in this regard.

So try it! Create a personalized reader for your child or grandchild to read, whether he or she needs extra help or not. Either way it's a fantastic project that will be a great benefit for the child!