

What Can Children's Books Teach Our Children?



Many of the most beloved, classic children's books tell an important message or teach a valuable lesson while still providing an entertaining or adventurous story. Such books are so important to the development of young children. Research shows it is imperative to convey positive, empowering messages to kids as they are growing up – and children's books are a great vehicle for delivering such messages.

I set out to write a children's book that would convey positive life lessons when I created *Ack! The Nantucket Duckling*. Learning how to treat others properly, to believe in themselves, to know it's ok to be different, and to be loved unconditionally are some of the important values that are depicted in my book.

Similarly, wonderful themes appear in plenty of picture books for young readers. Children learn:

- It's fun to explore and be curious (*Curious George* series)
- To trust what is in your heart (*The Little Prince*)
- How to be brave and daring (*Madeline*)
- How to balance self-interest and obligation (*The Day The Crayons Quit*)
- That knowledge is a powerful weapon (*Matilda*)

- It's okay to explore but there is no place like home (*Where The Wild Things Are*)
- It's good to try new things and not to fear change (*Green Eggs and Ham*)
- Someone will always be there for you even though you feel like you're alone (*The Giving Tree*)

Children's books are great at teaching children about things every parent wants their child to learn, including the bonds of friendship, how to treat each other fairly and decently, to love unconditionally, to stand up for what's right, to seek out what interests them, to dream big, to overcome loss, to do our best, to be responsible and respectful, and to always speak up for what's good, right, and fair.

Many children's books are beautifully illustrated as well. Kids learn by looking, listening, and reading. They hold a physical book in their hands – it is tactile. It engages the senses. They love to have a parent, grandparent, nanny, teacher, or babysitter read to them – and then they like to read aloud or to themselves. Bright colors and big images collaborate with the words to deliver memorable stories.

When I remember my childhood, I think fondly on the books I read. I am sure you can too. And as parents, we repeat that wonderful tradition of sharing stories and books with our kids, engaging them and sharing in their moments of discovery, observation, and questioning.

In *Ack!*, the main character is a little bright, yellow duck with a beak that doesn't quite look or sound like that of "normal" everyday ducks. He is different and treated as such. He is made to feel like an outcast. But his uniqueness turns him into a hero when he saves the day. He comes to love himself the way he is and others learn to accept him for who he is.

When you read with your child, provide a variety of books with powerful but fun messages. Mix it up – include some classics like Dr. Seuss – and try modern-day books as well. A great children's book is not just one that is an award-winner or a best-seller, though those are solid credentials, but one that helps children identify with the values, ideals, and character that you, as the parent, believe are needed.

After reading a book, discuss with your children:

- What happens in the story.
- Which character they liked/disliked – why.
- Why some of the characters did what they did.
- If each character did the right thing or at least tried his/her best.
- What they enjoyed/disliked about the book.
- How the story made them feel.

Children's books are great at helping kids develop their literacy skills. But they also can entertain kids and open doors to their imagination. And they can teach a moral or lesson that even adults could use a refresher in. Enjoy reading with your child – I am sure both of you will appreciate the experience.

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