

Nourishing Children with Books

Ann Hertzler*

Children's growth and development require nourishment for the body and mind. Reading books with nutrition themes provides experiences that contribute to both physical and mental well-being of children. Combine reading with the pleasures one gets from food and culturally diverse uses. There is no better way to impact the quality of the life of a child.

DIETARY GUIDELINES

A Aim for fitness

- ▲ Aim for a healthy weight.
- ▲ Be physically active each day.

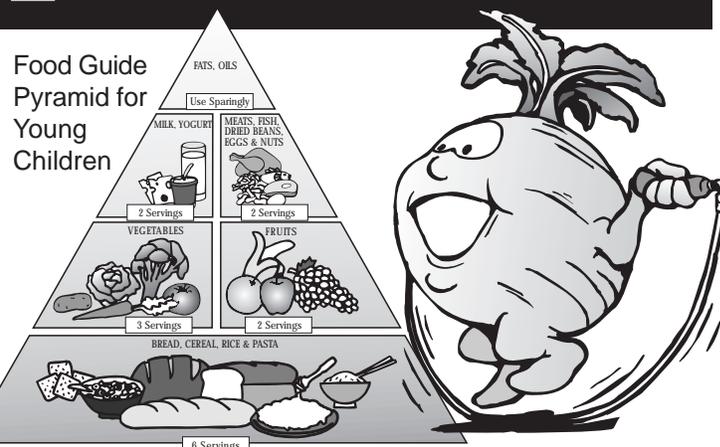
B Build a healthy base

- Let the Pyramid guide your food choices.
- Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains.
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Keep food safe to eat.

C Choose sensibly

- Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and moderate in total fat.
- Choose beverages and foods to moderate your intake of sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with less salt.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

1 Select story books to promote the Dietary Guidelines and the Food Guide Pyramid. All foods can fit. Balance the food you eat with physical activity.



DIVERSITY

- Incorporate customs and celebrations of the child's family, community and other cultures.
- Include majority and minority cultures in similar positions.
- Show diversity and avoid stereotypical gender roles.
- Feature cultures in daily living and not just special times. Cultural tourism (Thanksgiving Indians and Winter Eskimos) introduces misconceptions of an ethnic group and reinforces ethnic stereotypes.

3 Select books that incorporate culturally diverse ways of interacting and making decisions about food choices.

2 Select books at an appropriate reading level.

READING LEVEL

- Clear pictures to tell the story with or without words.
- Language/phrases repeated over and over or rhyming.
- Predictable (the reader can tell what is coming.)

* Extension Specialist, Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise, Virginia

READING BOOKS THAT NOURISH

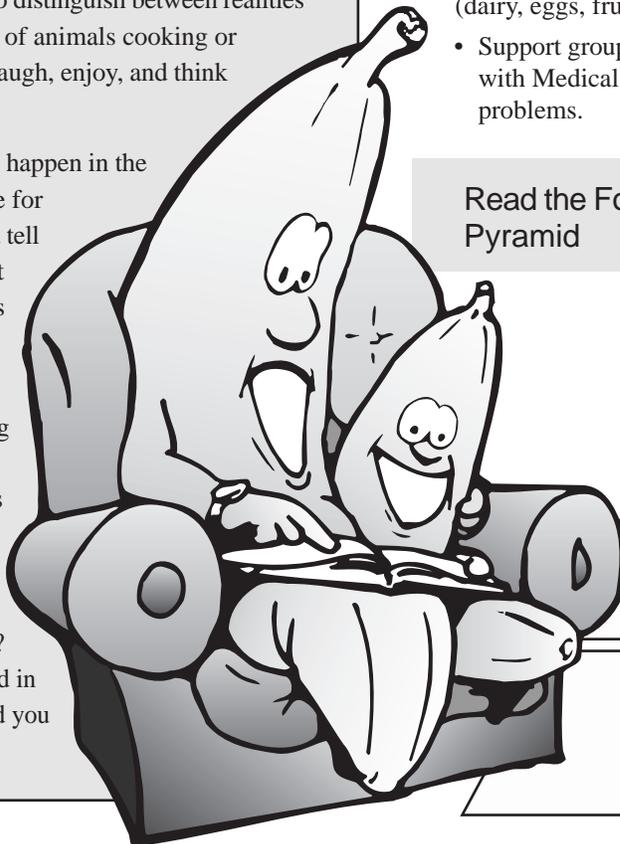
Children may be passive by just listening or be actively involved by reading the story, talking about what is happening, and responding to questions. Questions help children relate their experiences. Some answers are obvious (What are the foods in the picture?) Some are not so obvious (Who purchased the food?)

BEFORE: Point to the book cover to help the child predict what is going to happen. “What do you think this book is about?” As you continue reading, ask “What do you think is going to happen next?” or “Have you ever seen something like that?”

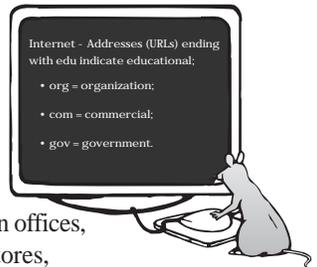
DURING: What foods are in the picture? Name the colors, shapes, and textures. Have you ever eaten this food? What do grownups eat? What do babies eat? What do other families eat everyday; for celebrations? What do animals eat?

- Who are the people? How are they like you? Who decides what to eat or where to eat? Who spends money? How does the family figure out what to eat? How do they learn about nutrition?
- What is real (meal planning, paying for food, kitchen clean up)? What is pretend (living on candy and cake)? Children learn to distinguish between realities and fantasies. Pictures of animals cooking or playing help children laugh, enjoy, and think critically.
- What kind of accidents happen in the kitchen? Is baking safe for children? How can you tell if things are hot? What are kitchen safety rules for small children?

AFTER: What was surprising about the story? What did not happen? How was this family like yours? How was it different? Did the book remind you of any other books you have read? Why? How does the food in the book relate to the food you should eat?



FINDING BOOKS THAT NOURISH



Search book lists of libraries, literacy groups, universities, and Extension offices, and on the Internet. Look for books at stores, consignment shops, and garage sales.

To find your local Virginia Cooperative Extension agent on the internet, log in at <http://www.ext.vt.edu/offices/> or <http://www.chre.vt.edu/HNFE/Nutrition.Central/>

Check credentials of the organization or the people responsible for the resource. Is there a scientific, educational basis for the content or recommendation? Or are ideas based on testimonials of a few? Is the purpose to make money?

Library collections, The Children's Book Council, and the National Agricultural Library have book lists developed by children's literacy specialists and librarians. <http://www.nalusda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/edu/preschool.html#Lan>

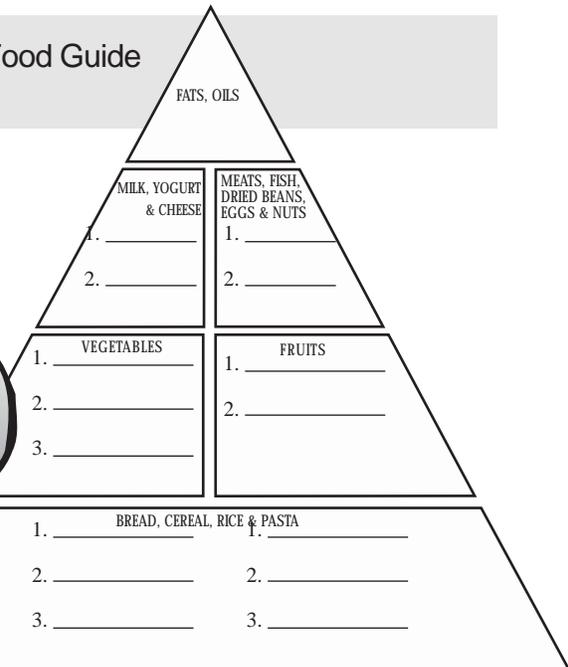
Literacy Groups - International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of English, National Association for the Education of Young Children.

- Children's Literature awards - <http://www.ucalgary.ca/dkbrown/index.html>
- American Library Association for Library Services to Children - <http://www.ala.org/alsc/>

Nutrition Sources - Government groups (USDA), professional associations (American Dietetic Association); health related organizations (cancer, diabetes, heart), or commodity groups (dairy, eggs, fruits, and vegetables)

- Support groups of families and/or professionals experienced with Medical Nutrition Therapy or Physically Challenged problems.

Read the Food Guide Pyramid



DEVELOPING NOURISHING BOOK MESSAGES

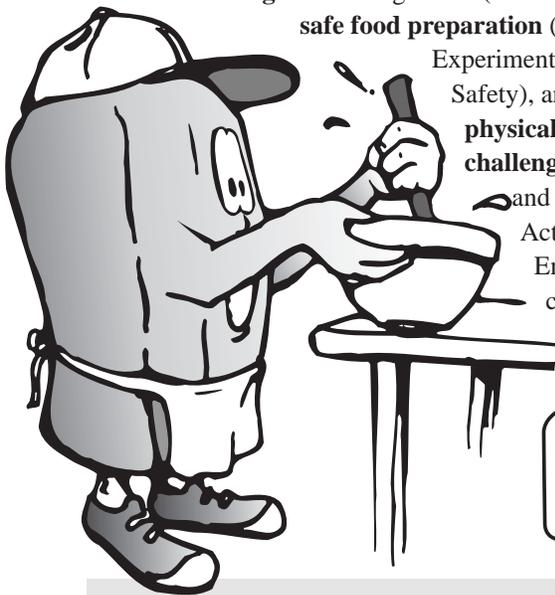
Teaching means active learning and participating in important grownup roles. Children will be drawn into reading when story books are related to their daily living events, capabilities, and interests. After reading a story book, plan followup activities to reinforce story book messages.

Nutrition Activities

Activities should emphasise the Dietary Guidelines and Food Guide Pyramid. Naming foods is just one kind of food and nutrition activity. A book about vegetables could include activities **naming** vegetables (Meals & Snacks), **touring** a vegetable garden to see what grows above and below the ground (Where Food Comes From), **using picture lists** to shop for vegetables (Food Shopping), **washing dirt** off vegetables (Food Safety), **defining**

safe food preparation (Science Experiments) (Kitchen Safety), and doing a **physical activity challenge** (Health and Physical Activity).

Encourage children to touch, taste,



Cut along the dotted line for your bookmark.



ACTIVITY CHECK LIST

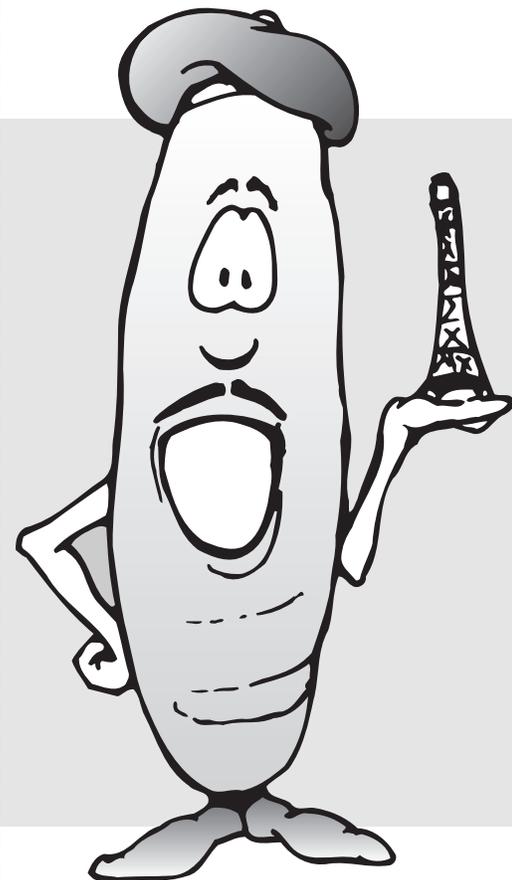
1. Are children active learners, and doing something ?
2. Does the activity support a nutritious message?
3. Is the activity culturally diverse?
4. Is it developmentally appropriate?
5. Can children physically do the activity?
6. Is the activity safe?
7. Is the activity curriculum based?

Daily Living Skills - Standards of Learning (SOLs)

Nutrition education activities provide meaningful experiences to support the school curriculum. Book activities can be designed to teach:

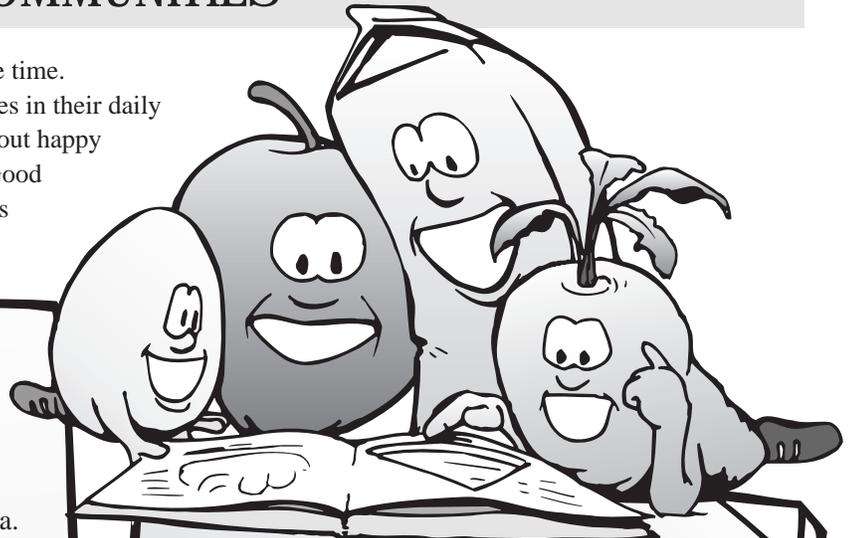
- **math** (what to do first; counting servings; dividing portions),
- **science** (parts of plants we eat; how food changes form, food safety, body systems),
- **geography & social studies** (where food comes from; history of food),
- **language arts** (colors, shapes, & sizes; reading food labels, writing stories,) planning menus and shopping lists provide writing activities to help reinforce book messages.
- **drawing pictures and writing words** (tell a story, learn about writers); and
- **art** (creative expression with food) encourage children to retell the story through puppets and dramatic play.

Read Around The World



READING - FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Some caregivers believe childhood is play and stress-free time. But young children are exposed to many food responsibilities in their daily routines and what they see in various media. They learn about happy and pleasant as well as disturbing and harsh experiences. Good literature shows a child how to cope and to develop attitudes and practices to enhance Quality of Life.



READING FOOD AND NUTRITION BOOKS IN COMMUNITIES

Building strong families with reading projects builds strong communities. Create parent support groups and community networks. Involve the media. Sponsor Reading Is Fundamental (RIF).

Make a CALENDAR of nutrition and reading events

- March - Nutrition Month;
- April - Children's Book Week, School Library Media Month, National Library Week;
- June - Dairy Month;
- September - Library Card Signup Month.

Conduct events where adults or older youth such as scouts, 4-H, or YMCA/YWCA groups can read to younger children. This can include reading activities at Malls, libraries, day care centers, hospitals, Literacy and Nutrition programs, and alternative settings (e.g. homeless shelters.)

Promote community programs in recreational centers, churches, and book stores to make books available to children and their families (garage sales, book banks, exchanges).

READING FOOD AND NUTRITION BOOKS IN FAMILIES

Let the child see family members reading. Adults who read stimulate children to read. Encourage a child by reading together: poems, newspapers, coupons, signs, or food packages.

- Join reading programs where children learn about books and about food and nutrition. Look for reading and food projects the family can do together - talking, planning, shopping, preparing food and visiting places where food comes from (e.g., gardens, orchards, and dairies) and regular visits to the library.
- Have the young child draw a picture(s) of the story and tell about it. Write down what the child says, word for word. Give the book or picture as gifts to family or friends.

OUTCOMES/IMPACTS/GOALS

Books provide the opportunity for youth to read about food and build experiences to encourage healthy food choices. Food behaviors carry over to the family and the community.

designed to provide the opportunities for youth to enhance reading skills, learn about food and build experiences that will encourage healthy food choices.

Expected Outcomes:

- Improved reading skills
- Excitement and Interest in reading
- Enhanced food choices for health and wellness
- Decreased consumption of sugary, salty and high fat snacks
- Increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains
- Increased consumption of milk and milk products
- Increased community reading and nutrition events

Children should be given opportunities to make choices from a variety of foods.



★ Awards

Award young readers and volunteers. Give certificates, ribbons, or book marks for books children read.

GOLD LEAF AWARD CERTIFICATES

The leaf represents book leaves and nutritious vegetable leaves, and gold signifies excellence.

