

Before going to school, children have already had a wide range of experiences with spoken, written, and visual communication, and have used language in familiar contexts. They have also developed ways of using language that are specific to their cultural and linguistic contexts. A child's success in school and throughout life depends in large part on the ability to be literate.

Oral language is the basis for literacy, thinking and relating in any language. Children first learn to use oral forms of language by listening and speaking, and then begin to explore the written forms of language by reading and writing. If a child's first language is a language other than English, families should continue to use their first lan-

Read aloud with your child every day. Read a variety of books, including wordless picture books, dual-language and first language books. While reading, ask open-ended questions about the story such as "Where do you think they might be going on the bus?" or "What do you think they will do when they get to the park?" Hearing a story read aloud helps children learn to focus and concentrate, and to appreciate the rhythm and cadence of the language. Most of all, reading aloud is fun for everyone involved.

Be a role model. Let children see you reading a wide variety of materials (books, magazines, recipes, instruction manuals) and writing for a variety of purposes (shopping lists, notes to others, instructions). Talk with your child about what you see other people reading and why. They will learn that reading and writing are fun and interesting things to do.