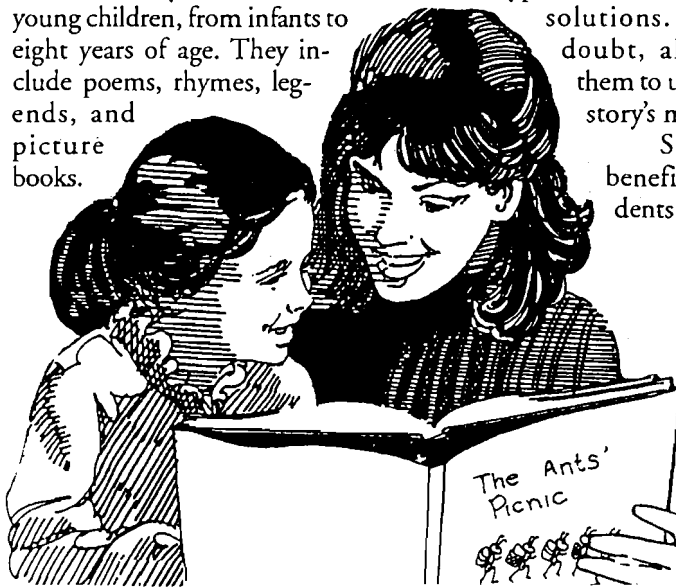


Many of us grew up enjoying listening to a large number of rhymes, poems, and stories. That's how we spent time entertaining ourselves before television. We were very lucky, indeed, to receive a rich heritage through oral storytelling. We learned culture and history, too.

Today's world has changed greatly. Young couples often set up their households far from family and friends when they find better work opportunities. Starting their family so far from their extended families, they lose access to a wonderful treasure: the stories and values these family members teach. Therefore, whether in English or Spanish, reading is a treasure—let's see why.

What is Young Children's Literature?

Young children's literature includes a variety of genres, or types, of literature. What is common to all is that they are of interest to young children, from infants to eight years of age. They include poems, rhymes, legends, and picture books.



The books contain many illustrations that support the story and add to its meaning. Topics can include traditional stories (fairy tales or legends), modern fantasy (talking animals, miniature children or people), realistic fiction (poverty, sibling rivalry), historical fiction, or biographies. Information books (electricity, volcanoes) are also available.

What Benefits Does It Offer?

Young children learn much when books are read aloud to them. From birth they learn about *language*, whether in Spanish or English. The more they are read to and read, children learn how to write and spell. Later, they master reading and writing at an earlier age. Students who have been read to and who can read at early ages achieve higher grades in language arts and higher scores on standardized tests. They also learn about the *internal structure of stories*: how they begin, types of conflicts, and possible solutions. Without a doubt, all this helps them to understand the story's message.

Still another benefit is that students learn *empathy*

for others, to see other sides to a story. It could be that they feel what the main character is going through (whether person or animal), be it fear, anger, humility. It provides opportunities for them to *interact with persons not in their immediate environment*, for example the elderly, witches, wise persons, people from different ethnic backgrounds or social status. Through books, children can *travel to far away lands*, learn about life in the jungle or about a cattle ranch.

In reading books about their own culture and that of others, children learn about *what is considered proper or appropriate behavior* for that culture. Depending on the story, they could learn about the need to respect the elderly, how to ask for forgiveness, or how to show you're sorry.

Finally, when reading fairy tales or modern fantasy, children learn *how to use their imagination, to view situations from various perspectives*, to know that events can be seen from different viewpoints. Assure a better future for your children: visit a school or public library real soon to select your books!

For more information on this topic, contact your school librarian or your neighborhood public library.

Reading Children's Books: There's More To It Than Meets The Eye