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Expanded Little Books Series Designed for Preschoolers

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ORONO, Maine -- The Little Books are back in a Big way. The popular series of small books for beginning readers, produced by the Center for Early Literacy at the University of Maine, is now available in a new form geared for use in preschools.

The earlier literacy education begins, the more able children are to take advantage of formal school instruction, says Center director and early literacy specialist Paula Moore. The new book series stems from her recent work with three to five year olds in a local daycare center. Under Moore's tutelage, these young children were able to clear the first big hurdle in the complex task of learning to read -- recognizing that the stories they enjoy come from organizing and understanding all those letters and words on the pages.

Shared and guiding reading are among the strategies that can help get that message across to preschool children, according to Moore, and the new Big Little Books are designed just for that purpose.

The series includes an extra large book for the teacher and matching small books for the students. The large book can be placed on an easel where the children can watch as the teacher reads the story, makes connections that strengthen language skills and points out letters and essential structural information such as sentences flow from left to right. Having their own little books to read after the teacher has read the big book helps young children make the transition to independent reading, Moore explains.

Like the earlier Little Books series, the five Big Little Books feature photos of real Maine children engaged in interesting activities from playing in the snow to feeding chickens. And like sales from all the Little Books, profits go to an endowment to help encourage and support other early literacy initiatives and programs. The goal of the Little Books project is to provide a variety of carefully crafted, low-cost books for research-based teaching and practicing of early reading skills.

Research is presenting new theories and overturning long-held assumptions about how and when children learn best, according to Moore, who edits the Little Books series. "We know from brain development research that the critical time for learning to read is between ages five and seven, but the ability to learn to read is based on the skills and stimulation children receive even before age three," she says. "Reading is part of nurturing; it's the emotional attachment to the experience that helps the brain develop."

It's important to take every opportunity to advance early reading skills, Moore emphasizes, and she sees child care centers as the logical setting. Many children spend 10 or more hours a day in child...
care, she points out. With the proper instruction and attitude, child care providers can make a tremendous difference in improving children's chances for success in kindergarten, says Moore.

The Center for Early Literacy in UMaine's College of Education and Human Development produced the first set of *Little Books for Early Readers* in 1995 and now offers a total of four different series. More information about the books is available from the Center, telephone (207) 581-2438.

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