

The First 5 Years

What to Know and When
for Reading Readiness



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Welcome

Your child's first five years are crucial to their development, a time when their brain is growing faster than it will at any other point in their lifetime. Take advantage of this time by instilling a love for reading. Encourage your child's curiosity, introduce them to new ideas and push them to use their imagination.

Whether your child is just a few months old or preparing to start kindergarten, you can read to them to help them build a foundation for future growth and learning. Reading to your child can teach them about emotions and empathy; it can help enrich their vocabulary, foster learning across languages and prepare them for their school journey.

For 26 years, [Reading by 9](#) has put together an assortment of resources and book recommendations to help parents build their child's literacy skills.

Available in English and Spanish, with generous support from the [Ballmer Group](#), this year's literacy guide is filled with bilingual book suggestions and advice from experts on topics ranging from social-emotional development to bilingual learning. Find research-based tips from local organizations, including [First 5 LA](#), [Plaza de la Raza Child Development Services](#), [Quality Start Los Angeles](#), [Children's Institute](#) and more.

We hope these resources will help direct you as you embark on a journey through literacy with the child in your life and introduce them to the wonderful world of reading.



Kate Sequeira
Audience Engagement Editor
Early Childhood Initiative
Los Angeles Times



Foster Language Development Before School Starts

By Ana Ligorria-Tramp, teacher at Vejar Elementary

Are you familiar with the slogan “Talk, Read, Sing”? These three activities help children create a foundation for oral language, which is essential to reading.

By building oral language, children develop phonemic awareness and learn to notice, think about and work with the individual sounds in spoken words – skills taught and developed in transitional kindergarten.

Talk:

When your baby coos or gurgles, “converse” with them. Talking to your child helps them connect sounds and meaning, builds vocabulary and fosters understanding of words.

Answer their questions and ask their opinions, thoughts and feelings. Describe objects and everyday activities to them. These actions will also encourage communication, curiosity and social skills.

Children will also be able to better communicate with others and fully participate in classroom discussions where they will share their feelings, thoughts, opinions and understanding about what they’re learning.

Read:

Instill love for books in your child by spending time each day reading with them. I started reading to my baby grandson the day he came home from the hospital.

Reading builds language skills by exposing children to new words. It also helps children learn about the world, which makes learning new subjects easier once they start school. As you read with your child, point to pictures and ask questions. Have them predict what the story might be about or share solutions to problems in the book. Ask them if they find the story relatable.

These conversations foster oral language and set the stage for oral comprehension, mirroring what happens in the classroom.

Sing:

Did you know that singing helps children learn about rhymes, rhythm and the cadence of language? Teaching children nursery rhymes, chants and finger-plays builds their vocabulary, and helps children build memory, develop listening skills and recognize patterns.

When we as parents nurture oral language skills, as their first and best teacher, we are providing a strong foundation for learning to read and write once they enter school.

It's Never too Early to Read to Your Child

From our friends at Quality Start LA

Reading together is a tried and true habit that takes your imagination to faraway places, supports your child's development and cultivates a one-of-a-kind bond between you and your child. Here are a few of our favorite tips that will help your child become a confident, joyful reader.

Make it Fun

For Ages 0-3

- ◆ Use gestures, facial and vocal expressions as you read, using different voices for different characters.
- ◆ Use puppets to expand on reading and storytelling.
- ◆ Act out different characters in the story with your child.

Tip:

Always bring your personal flair to reading time. Be interactive and read with animation – this is where you can spark imagination together.

Did you know?

Children are more likely to be strong, enthusiastic readers if parents have fun reading to them.



For Preschool and Beyond

- ◆ As you read, encourage children to retell the story while they look at the pictures.
- ◆ Dance or march to show different actions in a story.
- ◆ Ask them to predict "what would happen next" if they were the author of the story.

It's Never too Early to Read to Your Child

From our friends at Quality Start LA



Did you know?

When you bring conversation into storytime, you are accelerating your child's vocabulary. By naming an object, using number words, and introducing words that explain emotions, you are helping them understand their meaning, making them more likely to use these words.

Conversation is Key

For Ages 0-3

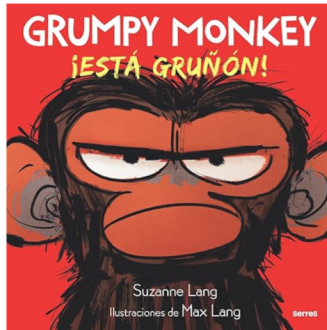
- ◆ While reading together, point at pictures and name objects. Repeat sounds of letters and model sound making.
- ◆ Build your child's vocabulary by naming what they see. When you see a plane, for instance, say, "Look at that airplane. The airplane has wings. Why do you think they are called wings?"
- ◆ Sing songs in your home language.

Tip:
Use Post-it notes to label objects around the house. This will teach your child new words, and make them more comfortable as you introduce more through reading. As they get older, add adjectives to the labels to broaden their vocabulary.

For Preschool and Beyond

- ◆ Show your child the words, talk about the pictures.
- ◆ Ask open-ended questions and allow time to respond.
- ◆ Choose books that help children expand their understanding of other people, cultures, race and beliefs.

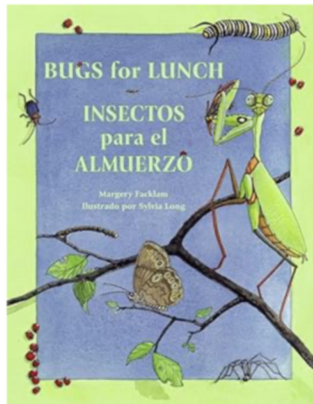
Book recommendations:



Grumpy Monkey / ¡Está gruñón!

Jim is in a horrible mood and just can't shake it. His friends make suggestions but Jim can't handle their kindness and throws a fit. Sometimes everyone just needs a day to feel grumpy.

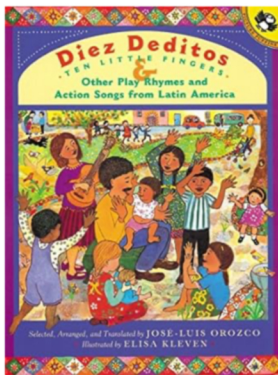
Suzanne Lang, Max Lang



Bugs for Lunch / Insectos para el almuerzo

Who eats bugs for lunch? Humans, animals and plants all do in this informative book of poems. Sate your little reader's quest for all things creepy and crawly with this fun book.

Margery Facklam, Sylvia Long



Diez deditos / Ten Little Fingers

Folk songs from many different Spanish-speaking countries grace the pages of this book of action songs. Follow diagrams and music included to delight young readers.

José-Luis Orozco, Elisa Kleven

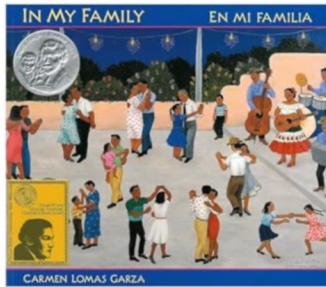


Freight Train / Tren de carga

This Caldecot Honor book helps young readers learn their numbers and colors in both English and Spanish. Help young readers with positional language and basic vocabulary using this classic book about trains.

Donald Crews

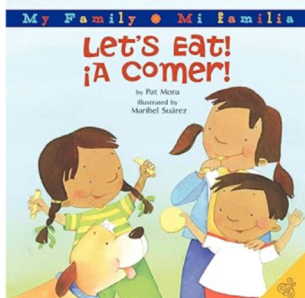
Book recommendations:



In My Family / En mi familia

Carmen Lomas Garza's paintings are described individually in both English and Spanish in this beautiful picture book. Illustrations about community and family are paired with memories about growing up in Kingsville, Texas.

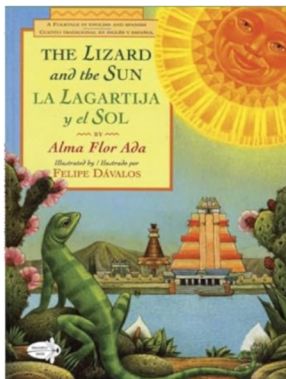
Carmen Lomas Garza



Let's Eat! / ¡A comer!

Written by the founder of the family literacy initiative, Children's Day, this book depicts a typical day with young children. Build bilingual vocabulary around everyday family activities.

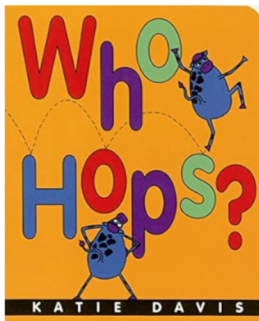
Pat Mora, Maribel Suarez



The Lizard and the Sun / La lagartija y el sol

After the sun disappears, people and animals are afraid. But a brave lizard refuses to give up until she brings back the light.

Alma Flor Ada, Felipe Dávalos

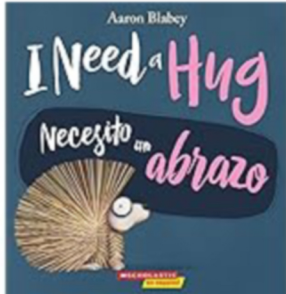


Who Hops? / ¿Quién salta?

Some animals don't hop, others can't crawl. Help your young reader discover how different creatures get around in this silly picture book, available in both English and Spanish.

Katie Davis

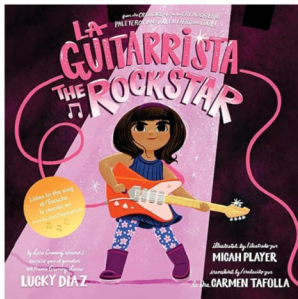
Book recommendations:



I Need a Hug / Necesito un abrazo

A short and silly book about a porcupine in need of a hug (and a snake that just wants a kiss). Each page is translated in both English and Spanish within clear speech bubbles for the reader.

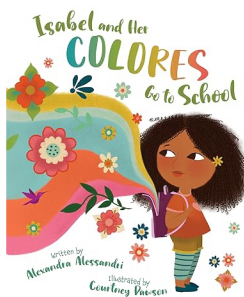
Aaron Blabey



La Guitarrista / The Rockstar

A young girl in Los Angeles follows her dreams to become a rockstar, using a broken guitar that she found in the trash. With the help of her community, she repairs and repaints the guitar to look brand new. Fully bilingual edition available May 7, 2024.

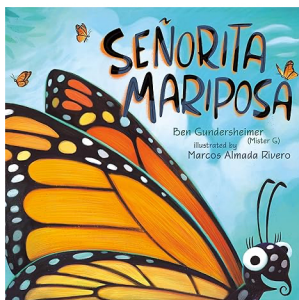
Lucky Diaz, Micah Player, Carmen Tafolla



Isabel and her Colores go to School

Isabel speaks Spanish. When she goes to school, she has a hard time feeling comfortable because her classmates all speak English. With the help of her colores, she finds that friendship is a universal language.

Alexandra Alessandri, Courtney Dawson



Señorita Mariposa

Señorita Mariposa makes her flight from the U.S. and Canada down to Mexico. Written in rhymes, some in English, others in Spanish, this book details the trip of the Monarch Butterfly. Read about how she delights the animals and people along her way.

Ben Gundersheimer, Marcos Almada Rivero

Literacy Milestones to Watch for as Your Baby Grows

From our friends at Plaza de la Raza

Reading readiness is a crucial aspect of early childhood development, encompassing a range of skills and experiences that lay the foundation for future academic success. Reading is not only for understanding, but also unlocks new worlds of stories, adventures full of imagination and knowledge for children.

Children are naturally curious and eager to learn about their surroundings. They imitate adults and learn about reading by watching and hearing other people read. The best way to engage them is to read stories to them. Repeating the same book is most enjoyable especially when it is about familiar experiences.

Some reading milestones include:

Infancy

Directs attention to a person, object

Tastes, reaches for books

Makes sounds, pats on books

Learns sounds communicate meaning

Toddlers

Holds and turns pages

Pretends to read books

Points to and names familiar pictures

Identifies books by picture on the cover

Preschool

Describes characters and events in the book

Takes turns telling and retelling stories

Understands that letters make up words

Draws pictures to tell a story

Asks questions

Children learn a lot about reading from everyday experiences. It is important to keep in mind that they develop at their own pace and may spend time in some stages more than others. Supporting children at this early age is essential for instilling a love for learning and later academic success.

Know How to Address Developmental Delays Early

From our friends at First 5 LA

We all know every child is unique, and when it comes to reaching their developmental milestones, even more so. Some children exhibit clear signs of developmental delays early on, while others may display subtle indicators that are easily overlooked. A developmental delay is when a child is not progressing or growing at the same rate as most of their peers.

Communication delays are particularly common in early childhood and can impact a child's reading and learning abilities. This underscores the importance of early screening and timely access to supportive services.

If your child isn't reaching their milestones, it might just mean they need a little extra help getting there. Below are three things you can do:

Read, Read, Read: Reading to children at a young age can help them develop speech and learning skills wherever they are in their growth path. Not only does it help them develop a love for reading, but it can help development.

Ensure screening: Be sure your child's healthcare provider has completed a standardized developmental screening at 9 months, 18 months and 30 months.

Initiate Intervention Early (if needed): The earlier a child receives support, the better their outcomes.

Remember, as a parent or caregiver, you play a crucial role as your child's primary advocate. For additional resources to assist in your child's developmental growth or to find support in accessing services, please visit HelpMeGrowLA.org.

Your Baby is a Linguistic Dynamo. Turbocharge their Superpower

By Giselle E. Navarro-Cruz

You may not realize this, but your newborn is a linguistic dynamo waiting to happen. Babies can distinguish 800 language sounds, which means they are primed to learn several languages – at the same time. Parents can turbocharge this superpower from the moment their infant is born by taking a few easy steps.

For many two-language households, an effective option is having one caregiver speak to the child in one language, the other in the second language. Other families opt for using their own bilingual mixture of languages with their infant. If only one language is spoken in the household, you can choose a childcare, babysitter or family members fluent in another language.

Whichever strategy you go with, the key is quality and quantity of communication. Babies learn language through human interaction, not TV, so parents should read, sing and talk to their baby as much as possible. Recite a rhyme while changing her diaper. Point out items at the park. Link the senses of taste, touch, sight and sound with words. Playing with your baby in both languages is important, and always make sure you pronounce words clearly.



Lastly, expose your baby to both languages outside your home. Take them to places where they will hear the different languages and encourage play with bilingual children.

It takes effort to raise bilingual kids, but the benefits will be manifold and last a lifetime.

Another hint:
Use “parentese” or baby talk. Infants respond to high-pitched, melodic tones and simplified repeated words. Reward them with smiles, clapping and plenty of praise.

Engage Your Child with a Read-Along



Escanee aquí
para ver este
video



Los Coquíes Aún Cantan / The Coquíes Still Sing

Reading books aloud to your child encourages their imagination and interest in reading. In this read-along video, check out, "The Coquíes Still Sing: A Story of Home, Hope, and Rebuilding."

Scan here
to watch
the video



How Reading Allows Kids' Mental Health to Flourish

From our friends at Children's Institute

The benefits of reading with children are innumerable. Children who read with their caregivers report higher levels of reading comprehension, fluency and self-confidence. But do you know of its mental health benefits? The therapists from Children's Institute shared insights and tips on reading with children for improved mental and behavioral health outcomes.

Self-regulation skills: Reading provides opportunities for children to explore their emotions. Characters in stories face challenges while experiencing and navigating emotions, providing children a safe space to understand and express their own feelings. This process contributes to emotional regulation and helps children develop coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and other difficult emotions.

Reading Activity: Act out the character's emotions with your child to practice reading facial expressions and body language.

Bonding and attachment: Reading with caregivers nurtures bonding and secure attachment, which are fundamental for healthy development. The shared experience of reading promotes feelings of safety, trust and connection. Strong attachments provide a secure base from which children can navigate the world.

Reading Tip: Create a routine for reading to encourage regularly scheduled times of bonding. For example, read together before bedtime.

Empathy and kindness: Reading helps children learn about empathy by allowing them to step into other people's shoes. Through storytelling, children connect emotionally with the characters as empathy is fostered. Children then learn to relate with others, helping them develop a sense of compassion.

Reading Tip: While reading with your child, encourage further cognitive engagement by asking questions.

How to Enhance Your Baby's Visual Development

by Isabella Balandran

Healthy vision is integral to a baby learning early literacy skills. To support literacy and vision development, parents should read to their child early on, limit screen time and watch out for any red flags as vision develops, pediatrician Edward S. Curry said.

Curry, who worked in pediatrics for more than 40 years at Kaiser Permanente in Tustin, Calif., shared advice for parents to make sure their babies' vision develops healthily.

In a baby's first few months, parents can begin developing early literacy skills by reading to their child with colorful picture books, especially with bright contrasting colors. Babies seeing the contrast between bright colors or black and white, such as a checkerboard can enhance their vision, Curry said.

One red flag parents can look out for is child's eyes cross, which may signify a visual impairment. If a child's eyes cross inward or outward, they should be seen by a pediatrician and may need to see an ophthalmologist for further evaluation, Curry said.

Parents should also look out for the "red reflex," when light reflects off the back of the eye and is visible in the pupils, commonly seen in flash photos when the eyes reflect red. If a child's eyes do not reflect the reddish-orange color, this may indicate an eye condition and should be evaluated by an ophthalmologist.

A baby's vision develops rapidly. At about 1 month, babies may focus on their parent or caregiver but may be most interested with colorful objects close to their field of vision.

Within the first two months of life, babies begin to recognize faces, see the brightness of color and develop depth perception. At about 3 months old, a baby's eyes begin to focus and track objects. Parents can encourage vision development through activities like holding a bright, colorful toy in front of your baby and moving it back and forth, to allow your baby to track it visually.

At around 5 months old, a baby begins to recognize and recall. Parents can help their baby develop visual memory by playing peek-a-boo or hide-and-seek games with toys.

Children's visual and sensory input enhances their brain development and socialization, so it's important for a baby to engage with the world around them, Curry said.

"We don't recommend a lot of screen time because then you're just focusing on one visual type of activity," Curry said. "You're not engaging in the full breadth of seeing the flowers and the trees and the faces and the smiling, and learning about emotions, happiness, sadness, crying – babies can pick up on that and it's all due to visual input."

Children's desk

- Questions from Parents
- Answers from Experts



Should I read to my newborn? It doesn't seem like they are gaining anything when I read to them.

Absolutely. Very young children may not show signs of engagement but brain development is a **slow and gradual process**. Their young minds are taking in everything around them, and building the very first neural connections. By 12 months, children will generally begin taking a more active role in storytime by turning pages, babbling and making the sounds of animals and objects in books, or even looking at books independently.

What toys help with literacy?

There is no substitute for books, reading and talking with your child during the first few years of life. Books with large, dynamic pictures and with rhyming, repetitive language **are the most beneficial**. This can be supplemented with letter blocks, sing-along toys and games with simple words and pictures, but still prioritize play together. Toys like dolls, animals, cars, play cookware and more encourage children to create their own narratives and stories. App-based and online literacy tools have become more popular in the past decade, but **recent literature suggests** that the light and audio stimulation in these programs detract from their efficacy as learning tools.

What should I do if my toddler doesn't seem interested in reading, and can't sit still during reading time?

Even if your child is distracted with other activities or fidgeting with toys, they benefit from hearing your voice and listening to stories. Exposure to a wide variety of words builds the foundations of a large vocabulary, and children's books contain **about three times** the number of rare words compared to most child-adult conversations. Also, stories do not have to be read all at once! Very young children may only sit still momentarily, but building a longer attention span **takes age and repetition of this practice**.

Authors

Plaza de la Raza



Plaza de la Raza is a nonprofit organization providing high-quality early education and comprehensive developmental services to families with children ages 0 – 5 years old and pregnant women. For more than 35 years, our agency has worked together with families to aid and support in the prevention of adverse childhood experiences. We are dedicated to breaking the cycles of inter-generational disparities, ensuring equitable access to imperative tools that promote school readiness, all while empowering parents to advocate for themselves and their children. Learn more at plazadelarazacds.org.

First 5 LA



As one of the state's largest funders of early childhood and an independent public agency, First 5 LA advocates for children and their families, amplifies community voice, and partners for collective impact so that every child in Los Angeles County reaches their full developmental potential throughout the critical years of prenatal to age 5. Learn more at first5la.org.

Children's Institute



CII's two generation approach strengthens individual, family and community capacity for healing, wellness and success. We offer high-quality early education and youth programs, counseling services, parenting supports, workforce and community leadership development and advocacy for community investment where it is needed most. Learn more at childrensinstitute.org.

QSLA



The Quality Start Los Angeles Dual Language Learner Initiative helps nurture multilingualism in L.A. County's young children by connecting with families and educators to create an environment where multilingual children feel safe and valued. It is supported by First 5 LA, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, UNITE-LA, Early Edge and the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles. To find out more about the benefits of being bilingual visit qualitystartla.org/dual-language-learners-initiative.



Authors

**Giselle E.
Navarro-Cruz**



Giselle E. Navarro-Cruz is an associate professor of the Early Childhood Studies Department at Cal Poly Pomona and serves as a consultant for Quality Start LA's Dual Language Learners Initiative. Dr. Navarro-Cruz's passion for early childhood education began when she was an assistant teacher at the UCLA childcare center as well as a research assistant for several UCLA children research labs. She is an advocate for supporting young, multilingual children and families access to high-quality ECE.

Isabella Balandran



Isabella Balandran is a co-producer for the L.A. Times youth journalism program High School Insider. HSI is a platform for young writers, photographers, and storytellers to submit and publish stories on highschool.latimes.com. HSI also offers semiannual workshops for high school students to sharpen their journalistic skills and join a community of young storytellers. Students can stay up-to-date with announcements on Instagram @hsinsider and sign up at highschool.latimes.com/joining-high-school-insider.

**Ana
Ligorria-Tramp**



Ana Ligorria-Tramp is a veteran teacher of 37 years in the Pomona Unified School District. She has taught first grade, kindergarten and transitional kindergarten. She is passionate about teaching young children to read. Tramp has a MA in Education/ Literacy from CSU Fullerton and an MA in Education/ Reading Specialist credential from La Verne University. In her spare time she enjoys playing, singing, and reading to her new baby grandson.



List of programs and community organizations

Literacy Services

Access Books

(310) 284-3452
accessbooks.net

Children's Institute

4 centers in LA County
(424) 536-4320
childrensinstitute.org

CSUN LA Times Literacy Center

18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330
(818) 667-7394
<https://www.csun.edu/teaching-learning-counseling-consortium/la-times-literacy-center>

Parentis Foundation

24012 Calle de la Plata,
Suite 400
Lauguna Hills, CA 92653
(949) 305-2716
parentisfoundation.org

Raising a Reader

Sobrato Center for Nonprofits
489 Valley Way
Milpitas, CA 95035
(650) 489-0550
Raisingareader.org

Reach out and Read

119 providers in LA County
(617) 455-0600
reachoutandread.org

Reading is Fundamental of Southern California

7250 Bandalini Blvd., Suite 209
Commerce, CA 90040
(323) 890-0876
Rifsocal.org

Reading Partners

5350 Wilshire Blvd. #36216
Los Angeles, CA 90036
(213) 399-8599
Readingpartners.org/location/los-angeles

Reading to Kids

1600 Sawtelle Boulevard,
Suite 210
Los Angeles, California 90025
(310) 479-7455
readingtokids.org

Read to a Child

10940 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 100
Los Angeles, CA 90024
(310) 208-5300
readtoachild.org/los-angeles

Ready, Set, Read!

1000 N. Alameda St. No. 240
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(818) 986-9867
readyssetread.org



The Book Foundation

5429 W. Washington Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016
(323) 746-5800
makegoodinc.org/the-book-foundation

The Book Truck

733 Walnut Ave.
Long Beach, CA 90813
(562) 264-5841
thebooktruck.org

List of programs and community organizations (continued)

Support Services

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors

1000 N Alameda St, No 240
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 346-3216
ap-od.org

Families Forward Learning Center

980 N. Fair Oaks Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91103
(626) 792-2687
Familiesforwardlc.org

First 5 LA

750 North Alameda
Los Angeles, CA, 90012
(213) 482-5902
first5la.org

Hands Together

201 Civic Center Drive
Santa Ana, CA 92701
(714) 479-0294
handstogether-sa.org

Koreatown Youth and Community Center

3727 W. 6th St. No.300
Los Angeles, CA 90020
(213) 365-7400
Kyccla.org

Little by Little

15 sites across Southern California
lbleaders.org

Mar Vista Family Center Preschool

5075 S. Slauson Ave.
Culver City, CA 90230
(310) 390-9607
marvistafc.org

Mexican American Opportunity Foundation

27 locations across Southern California
(323) 890-1555
maof.org

Pathways LA

3325 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 1100
Los Angeles, CA 90010
(213) 427-2700
pathwaysla.org

Plaza de la Raza

13300 Crossroads Pkwy N.
Ste. 440
City of Industry, CA 91476
(562) 776-1301
plazadelarazacds.org

Proyecto Pastoral Centro de Algeria

N. Soto St.
Los Angeles, CA 90033
(323) 685-8501
proyectopastoral.org

Proyecto Pastoral Centro la Guarderia

157 S. Gless St
Los Angeles, CA 90033
(323) 881-0010
proyectopastoral.org

Quality Start Los Angeles

815 Colorado Blvd. 4th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90041
(855) 507-4443
qualitystartla.org

South Central LAMP

892 E. 48th St.
Los Angeles, CA 90011
(323) 234-1471
Southcentrallamp.org



List of programs and community organizations (continued)

Libraries

Little Free Library

150,000 pop-ups throughout the U.S.

(715) 690-2488

littlefreelibrary.org

Los Angeles Public Library

72 branches

(213) 228-7000

lapl.org/branches

Los Angeles County Library

86 branches

(323) 264-7715

lacountylibrary.org/library-locator

Orange County Public Libraries

33 branches

(714) 566-3000

ocpl.org/libraries

Ventura County Public Library

14 branches

(641) 829-4410

vencolibrary.org/



LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY

Visit the Los Angeles Public Library's [Storytime Anytime](#), where you can introduce your child to new authors and illustrators, and help them develop a love of stories.

With your library card, you can explore the recorded storytime collection on various topics and even in different languages. The talented librarians have recorded a variety of stories, songs, and rhymes that your children are sure to love. You can access these recordings from the comfort of your own home and watch them whenever it's convenient for you.