



**National Institute for Literacy**  
The Partnership for Reading

Shining  
Stars

**PRESCHOOLERS**

GET READY TO READ



HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR PRESCHOOLERS GET READY TO READ

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

You are your child's first and most important teacher. This booklet gives you ideas on how to help your young child get ready to read.

- Read the story *A Boat Named Lucky* on **PAGES 1-3**. Watch for ways the parents in the story help their children get ready to read. Before you begin reading, you might want to look at the checklist on the back page for ideas.
- Read the page from the story *Anna's Sails* on **PAGE 4**. Look at the questions and activities parents can use with *Anna's Sails* to help their children learn more about stories, words, and sounds.
- Try these ideas with other books whenever you read with your child.
- Read the checklist on the back page for reminders on how to make reading time more fun and interesting. You might post it on the refrigerator, or use it as a bookmark.

# A Boat Named Lucky

**T**he three most important people in my life are my wife Antonia and our two kids, Lucy and Anthony. Lucy is four, and Tony is three. They're both in preschool. It seems like only yesterday we were watching them crawl. Now they're on their way into the big world.

At first, I didn't think I could help much with their reading. I've never been much of a reader myself. I thought that would be my wife's job. But she said, "No, we both need to help them. Come on, we can do it together." So I gave it a try, and I'm not so bad! I can help my kids with some of the things they'll need when they start school, like learning new words, practicing the alphabet, and writing their names.

Lucy loves to make up stories. Sometimes when we finish reading a book she asks, "What happens next, Daddy?" I don't know, of course, so I ask her: "What do *you* think happens next, honey?" We read one book about a girl who was trying to find her parents, and Lucy made up a new ending: "After the girl found her parents, she took them to China because she loved China and wanted to show it to them." That got me thinking, so I asked her questions: how did they get there? How long did it take? Did she know how to speak Chinese?

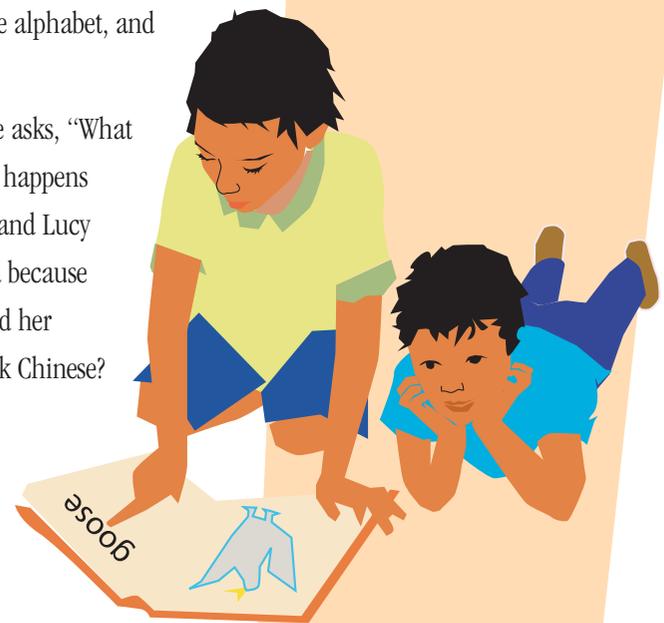
**Sometimes Lucy pretends to read to her little brother.** She can't read yet, but she pretends. One day I watched her show Anthony how to hold a book.

"See, this is the top," she said.

"Top!" he said, pointing.

"Some pages have pictures and words," Lucy said, pointing to each. "And words have letters."

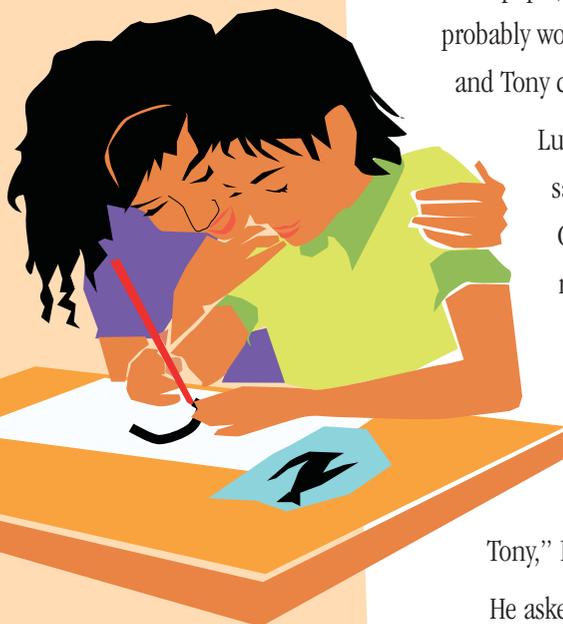
*Lucy pretends to read.*



*Lucy's dad asks her questions about the stories they read.*

*Lucy and her Dad play games with words that rhyme.*

*Lucy's mom helps her write words.*



“Letters,” he repeated.

Lucy knew the story pretty well because we had read that book many times before. She was only remembering the story, but she moved her finger under the words as she “read.” Anthony looked like he was in heaven.

Later, when her brother was napping, Lucy and I read the book together. I decided to have some fun with it, so I changed a couple of words. Instead of “goose” I read “moose.” Lucy laughed and said, “it’s not a golden moose, it’s a golden goose!”

“You’re right,” I said, and went on reading but then instead of “goose” I said “caboose.”

“No, no, it’s a goose, you silly Daddy!” She thought I was just teasing but I was happy she could hear the difference.

**Lucy knows the whole alphabet, and is starting to write it, too.** She asked her mother to help her and Tony make an alphabet book. Antonia got the children some paper, old magazines, and scissors, and waited for them to ask for help. I’m very hands-on—I probably would have jumped in and started telling them how to do it. But I saw that this way, Lucy and Tony could start with what they already know and make the book really “theirs.”

Lucy cut out a picture of a kitten first. I figured she’d use it for K, kitten, or C, cat, but she said, “Mom, does Gato start with G?” When Antonia said yes, Lucy asked for help writing GATO to go with her picture. Gato is the family cat, a little kitten from the pound. He was napping in a patch of sunlight near Tony.

Tony held up a picture of a boat. “That’s a canoe, Tony, for the letter C, right?” I asked.

“No, Dad—boat,” he said.

“That’s right, it’s a boat. And this kind of boat is a canoe,” I said. “Canoe starts with C, Tony,” I said. I wrote out the letters for him and he pasted his picture of a canoe above them. He asked, “Can we find more boat pictures?”

Tony’s question reminded me that I once built a sailboat when I was a kid, so I said, “let’s make one!” After supper, we all walked to the library. The librarian helped us find some books on toy boats. We picked one with a simple boat we could make ourselves.

I brought home some scraps of wood from the construction site where I work. I sawed off two corners of a board for the front of the boat, and saved one corner for the keel. “This is the hull,” I told Lucy and Tony, pointing to the side of the boat. “The front of the boat is the bow. The back is the stern.” They took turns sanding the hull.

When they were finished, I drilled a hole for the mast, and nailed the keel to the bottom of the hull. “The keel keeps it from tipping over,” Antonia explained. She and the kids glued a pencil in the hole I had drilled for the mast.

“Here’s a sail,” Lucy said. She held up a paper sail she had cut out. “Can I put it on the—what is it? The mast?” Antonia told her she was right and helped her glue the sail to the pencil.

We were almost ready to launch. Tony wanted to put a picture of his toy cowboy, Curt, in the boat. Lucy wanted to name the boat. I held the boat steady and Antonia helped Lucy write LUCKY on the stern with a marker.

We took the boat to a stream nearby that flows to the ocean. Tony put his drawing in the boat, and Lucy laid the boat gently in the water. “The bow goes in front, right?” She asked. I smiled and nodded yes.

Tony gave it a little shove. The boat spun around once and slipped into the current. We watched it bob out of sight.

“Bye-bye, Cowboy Curt,” he said.

“Bye-bye, Lucky,” Lucy said.

I felt good as I watched the boat disappear. Antonia and I had just showed our kids how to use books to learn how to do something! The boat, Lucky, wasn’t the only thing we launched that day.

**The End.**

*Lucy and her mom talk about the first sound in a word.*

*Every day Lucy and Tony’s parents teach them new words, like “mast,” “bow,” and “stern.”*



# There's more to reading together than just saying the words.

Try asking your preschooler questions like these when you read together.

## Talk about the story

- **What does Anna make?**  
*Sails.*
- **What are Anna's sails like?**  
*They're soft and white.*
- **Why is it important that sails are strong?**  
*So that they don't rip in the wind.*
- **Why do you think people wanted to buy Anna's sails?**  
*Because they are strong and beautiful.*
- **What do you think the king will say about Anna's sails?**  
*He will probably like them and say that they are the best sails he has ever seen.*

## Talk about the words and sounds

- **What sound does 's' make?**  
*Point to the words in the page start with the letter "s."*  
*There are eleven. (Sails, sails, sails, she, sewed, softer, silk, storm, strong, softest, sails)*
- **Let's think of three more words that start with the "s" sound.**  
*Sandwich, super, sidewalk*

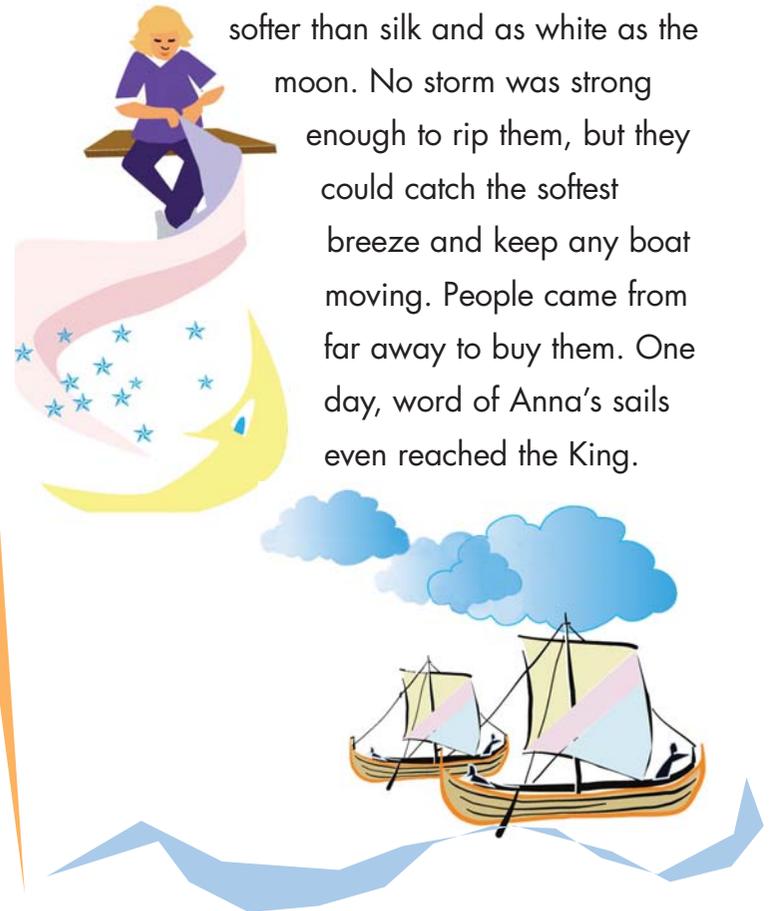
- **Can you think of words that rhyme with sail?**  
*(mail, tail, rail)*
- **If we take the "s" sound from slip, snip, and strip, we can make new words. Can you say the new words?**  
*(lip, nip, trip)*
- **What words rhyme with sing?**  
*(ring, king, wing)*
- **If we take the "s" sound from stall and small, we can make new words. Can you say these words?**  
*(tall, mall)*

## Talk about new words

- **Anna's sails are made of silk, which is a kind of cloth. What things can you think of in our house that are made of cloth?**  
*Shirts, coats, towels, napkins*
- **How is cloth different than wood?**  
*Cloth is soft and wood is hard. You can make clothes out of cloth but not wood. (Etc.)*
- **A village is a small town. What do we call a big town?**  
*A city.*

## Anna's Sails

**A**nna made sails for boats. The sails she sewed were more beautiful than anyone in the village had ever seen. They were softer than silk and as white as the moon. No storm was strong enough to rip them, but they could catch the softest breeze and keep any boat moving. People came from far away to buy them. One day, word of Anna's sails even reached the King.







# Checklist

FOR PARENTS OF PRESCHOOLERS

*Here are some ways you can help your child “get ready to read” during the ages of 4 and 5. You can find examples of many of these in “A Boat Named Lucky,” the story in this booklet.*

- I help my child hear and say the first sound in words (like “b” in boat), and notice when different words start with the same sound (like “boat” and “book”).
- I help my child hear words that rhyme (like moose, goose, and caboose).
- I introduce new words to my child, like “bow” and “stern,” which mean the front of a boat and the back of a boat.
- I talk with my child about the letters of the alphabet and notice them in books, like “c” for canoe.
- I point out signs and labels that have letters, like street signs and foods in the grocery store.

(over)

- I encourage my child to find the joy and fun in reading. Usually, I let my child choose the books we read.
- I let my child pretend to read parts of the book when we read together.
- I talk with my child about stories and make connections to things that happen in our own lives.
- I ask “what,” “where,” and “how” questions when I read with my child to help her follow along and understand the stories.
- I help my child write notes or make books (like an alphabet book), even if his writing only looks like scribbles or marks.

This checklist is adapted from *A Child Becomes a Reader—Birth Through Preschool*. Get a free copy at [www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov).