

Finding the Math in (Almost) Any Picture Book



Tips for Families



Reading time is a perfect opportunity to build math thinking—no worksheet needed! Even books that aren't "math books" are full of opportunities to talk about math. Below are some strategies for you to use from time to time when reading with your children! Some of the strategies might work best with younger children, while others may be a better fit for older children. You don't need to use every tip—choose the ones that match your child's age, interests, the book, and what feels natural during story time.

1. Spot Numbers in the Story

Many stories include numbers without being "math books." Pay attention to quantities, page numbers, ages, or anything with a number attached.

- Ask: "How old is the character?" "What number do you see on the house?"
- Talk about what the numbers mean in the context of the story.

Example: "The birthday cake has 6 candles—how old is she turning?" or "There's a #5 on that race car. What do you think it means?" This gives your child the opportunity to notice and think about the different ways we see and use numbers in our world.

2. Look for Sizes and Amounts, Estimate!

Use illustrations or story moments as a springboard to build number sense.

- Count items on a page together. Ask: "How many animals are on this page?"
- Estimate, then check: "How many do you think there are?"
- Talk about: Which groups are "about the same" or "more than" others.
- Talk about: How many more or fewer, what comes next, or how things compare.

Example: In a book about animals at a zoo, you might ask: "How many ducks do you think are in the pond?" → "Let's count them!" "If there are 3 lions and 5 zebras, how many animals is that altogether?" Or: "Which basket do you think has more apples?"



3. Notice Patterns or Repetition

Stories with repeated phrases, actions, or sequences are great for exploring patterns.

- Ask: *"What comes next?"* or *"Do you notice a pattern?"*

Example: In books like "Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed" you can ask, *"What do you think will happen next?"* *"What is happening to the number of monkeys on each new page?"*

4. Compare and Describe

Use stories to talk about size, shape, length, weight, speed, or other comparisons.

- Ask: *"Which is taller?"* *"Which looks heavier?"* *"Which one came first?"*

Example: In a story about building a treehouse, ask:
"Whose ladder is the longest?" or *"Which treehouse is higher?"*

5. Explore Spatial Relationships & Language

Words like *above*, *below*, *behind*, *inside*, *next to* help younger children build spatial awareness.

- Ask: *"Where is the cat hiding?"* or *"Can you find what's under the bed?"*

Example: Try acting out the story afterward using toys to reinforce spatial ideas saying, *"Your book is on the couch. Now your book is under the table"* as you move the book.

Remember: Math is more than numbers!

When kids talk about patterns, compare sizes, notice order, or explain their thinking—they're doing math. Every story is a chance to grow their confidence and curiosity!