

## Why we teach babies animal sounds

If you've gotten excited about a toddler's exuberant "woof!" when they spot a dog, you're not alone. Connecting with toddlers using animal sounds helps with early language development. There is almost an obsession to get babies and toddlers to say "moo" or "baa!"

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), babies start babbling around 4-6 months old, saying consonant-vowel sounds like "ma" or "um," and then strings of syllables like "babababa!"



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Animal sounds bridge babbling and actual words for toddlers. Many animal sounds are easier to say than animal names. For example, "baa" is easier to sound than "sh" in "sheep."

As babies grow into toddlers and preschoolers, activities like games, songs and books with animal sounds help them hear, imitate and play with sounds in spoken language. This skill set, phonological awareness, is critical for learning to read and write.

Language is learned by recognizing, mimicking and attaching meaning to sounds. Social interaction exposes babies and toddlers to spoken language and is one way this development happens.

Animal noises are one of many sounds that help kids develop language skills. Toys, books and conversations about animals put their language skills to work. Language interaction means more exposure and practice for children, so having this shared experience with caregivers, parents and other children is key.

Words assigned to animal sounds vary across languages, because they've been filtered through each language's characteristics and rules. According to linguist Arika Okrent, in Japanese, /kw/ sounds are not found, so ducks don't say "quack," but rather "ga ga." Okrent also points out that animal sounds

use a language's standard features. So, with all the rolling R's of their human counterparts, French pigs say, "groin-groin." All of this suggests that animal sounds in each language are tailored to support speech development in that language.

Animal sounds reflect familiar experiences in culture, too. Derek Abbott of the University of Adelaide in Australia created a fascinating spreadsheet on animal-related utterances in different languages. You'll notice only one moose sound — "bröl" in Swedish — because Sweden is where a child is most likely to spot a moose strolling around.

Children's toys, songs and books often highlight farm animals as stars. Reading farm animal noise books together is an excellent way to support baby and toddler's language learning.

Check out these farm animal noise books to start your journey mooing, quacking and baaing with your babies and toddlers!

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780679809012/open-the-barn-door-find-a-cow-by-christopher-santoro/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780593430569/peek-inside-the-farm-by-becky-davies-illustrated-by-fhiona-galloway/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780399256011/the-very-busy-spider-by-eric-carle-illustrated-by-eric-carle/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780763675899/can-you-say-it-too-quack-quack-by-illustrated-by-sebastien-braun/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780593378724/hello-world-on-the-farm-by-jill-mcdonald/>

Abstracted by Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, from "Brightly: Raise Kids Who Love to Read" by Lindsay Barrett, Penguin Random House.

**BABYREAD'S MISSION** is to raise the literacy level in Oconee County by encouraging moms/caregivers to read daily to children from birth. This prepares children for success in school and in life. Readers read with moms/caregivers in person at town or school libraries. We have a COVID option. Questions? Contact Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., president, at [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net) or (864) 643-8083 or visit [babyread.org](http://babyread.org).