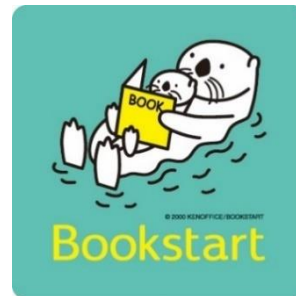


What Does Bookstart Accomplish in Japan?

--- A Research Report ---



Written, edited and published by
Bookstart Japan

About Bookstart Japan

Bookstart Japan is a private nonprofit organization that conveys the principles of Bookstart and supports its implementation by local governments from an independent, neutral standpoint.

Besides disseminating information on Bookstart collected around the country, by issuing publications and holding workshops, we vend low-cost Bookstart packs to all participating local governments in a “non-commercial” model.

In addition, we share information with baby bookgifting organizations in countries and regions around the world, including in the UK, where Bookstart began.

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Foreword

Bookstart in Japan operates in the hope that warm, enjoyable moments of “sharing books” will become part of life for all babies. By offering fun experiences reading picture books, and then gifting picture books to families, we provide parents and carers with an impetus to carry on sharing books at home. Begun in the UK in 1992 by BookTrust, Bookstart came to Japan in 2000 and has since expanded around the country.

The nonprofit organization (NPO) Bookstart Japan was founded in 2001. We aim to help meaningful, sustained activities take root throughout our country by providing various kinds of support.

In Japan, Bookstart activities and decisions are undertaken by local governments and incorporated in their budgets. Activities happen in partnership with local libraries, health centers, child-rearing support divisions, and volunteer organizations. Opportunities such as *baby group health checkups* are offered to all babies in a local jurisdiction, and thus serve as useful points of contact.¹ As of July 2021, out of 1,741 municipalities in Japan, some 1,083 (62.2%) were implementing Bookstart programs (Bookstart Japan survey). (See appendices for further data on Bookstart in Japan.)

This report is a translation of “*What Does Bookstart Accomplish?*” *A Research Report* (published in Japanese by Bookstart Japan, 2014; henceforth *Research Report*), excerpted and edited.

Over many years of operation, our organization has carefully considered what we are about. We hope now to share our understanding with our colleagues overseas, who may be keen to start baby bookgifting programs or are already running them.

We do not see Bookstart’s purpose as furthering children’s education in Japan. Rather, we focus on the pleasures of sharing picture books with babies—the joy and the delight—and on the exchange of feelings that happens between adult and child. We see this as a wellspring of human empathy and strength, and we have grown and developed all of our activities around it. We use the phrase “share books” far more often than “read books” in Bookstart.

Since 2018, the Global Network of Early Years Bookgifting has come into its own, centered around EURead (a consortium of European reading promotion organizations, www.euread.com). Japan took part in the preparatory working group for this network, exchanging experiences and opinions with other countries and regions. In the course of this exchange, we began to sense that our approach is somewhat unique.

We therefore decided to publish our *Research Report* in a language that many colleagues worldwide can access, in order to share our perspective on what Bookstart can be. We hope that our experience might prove useful to the continued development of Bookstart around the world.

We originally wrote our *Research Report* to answer the question, *What does Bookstart accomplish?* As an activity carried out in partnership with public entities such as local governments, Bookstart uses public funds from taxes, so this question will continue to be asked.

The purposes of activities like Bookstart are often described in terms of quantifiable “benefits.” When it comes to sharing books with children, many people expect “benefits” such as enriched vocabulary, increased knowledge and study skill, and heightened imagination, and they expect that these can be shown in easy-to-understand numerics. But we in Bookstart Japan have not built our activities around such “benefits,” and we have not tied sharing picture books to furthering children’s education. We have tried to ensure that focusing on easy-to-explain “benefits” does not lead us to forget other important perspectives.

Bookstart is an undertaking *without* easy-to-see, easy-to-chart “benefits.” Multiple influences affect a baby’s environment, so it is difficult to show that “parent-child bonding improved” or “the baby grew up happy,” thanks to Bookstart. Often, in the local communities where Bookstart is carried out, other reading promotion and parent support initiatives are also underway. In such cases, even if “benefits” are seen, it would be difficult to tie them to Bookstart alone.

It is quite impossible, in the first place, to explain fully why sharing picture books matters, or how the joy stemming from such an activity makes a difference. The transformations of people’s hearts ultimately defy being quantified.

¹ Among local municipalities with which we partner in Japan, 69% have incorporated Bookstart in well-baby group health checkups. Those locales not offering group health checkups have incorporated Bookstart in newborn home visits and parent-child health initiatives (20.6%) (data as of March 2021).

With this in mind, we have focused our *Research Report* not on numbers but on the kinds of things Bookstart accomplishes. Parts I and II look at ways in which it affects babies, caregivers, and parent-child relationships. Part III looks at ways in which it affects local governments, organizations, and related individuals.

In Parts I and II, we probe whether the positive effects of “sharing books” are reaching more babies, caregivers, and parent-child relationships due to Bookstart, with two levels of analysis:

- In Part I, we analyze concrete examples of sharing books with a baby, exploring what “sharing books” offers for everyone concerned.
- In Part II, we analyze the results of a survey of caregivers who had been eligible for Bookstart. We consider whether the programming served as a clear impetus for them to continue “sharing books” with babies in homes.

If Bookstart clearly increases “sharing books” in homes (Part II), we believe we can deduce that what such sharing offers to babies, carers, and parent-child relationships (Part I) is being more widely enjoyed.

In addition, Bookstart has come to involve many people at the regional and local level, and it has developed as a local activity. In Part III, we analyze local conditions and the statements of local stakeholders to clarify what Bookstart offers for local governments, organizations, and related individuals. This English-language version offers a summarized Part III.

Our *Research Report* was prepared with the expert feedback and editing of Dr. Hiroko Sasaki, Professor Emerita, Naruto University of Education, and Dr. Kiyomi Akita, Professor, Gakushuin University. Dr. Sasaki also contributed commentary about the findings in Part I.

Abstract

In Part I of this report, we analyze numerous examples of adults sharing picture books with babies. From these examples, we learn that such sharing does far more than aid babies’ growth and development or bring about short-term educational gains.

“Sharing books” can enrich the process of bonding with baby, add numerous delights to daily child-rearing, and sometimes help a caregiver out.

“Sharing books” itself brings joy to babies, as well as a sharing of understanding between people, which in turn nurtures cooperation. In addition, opening a book together strengthens the family and exemplifies sharing across generations. It also serves as proof that those enjoying the book were alive together.

In Part II, our analysis of survey responses finds that, in households with access to Bookstart, the programming provided a clear impetus to increase “sharing books.” In respondents’ households, the point at which reading aloud began at home usually coincided with the timing of Bookstart access, and parents usually began reading aloud using the books they had received through Bookstart.

Analysis of respondents’ comments indicates that watching children encounter picture books during Bookstart programming, experiencing the fun of it, and interpreting children’s reactions to it bore a strong relationship to whether the programming led to “sharing books” at home.

Part I shows that “sharing books” can greatly enrich babies, caregivers, and parent-child relationships. Part II suggests that Bookstart functions to stimulate “sharing books” in most participating households. Together, these findings suggest that due to Bookstart, more households reap a rich harvest from “sharing books.”

Part III examines positive changes observed in local governments, organizations, and individuals due to Bookstart. Many Bookstart-adopting locales seem to enjoy a positive cycle of well-baby development, relaxed parenting, and happier households.

Due to the above, Bookstart in Japan can be said to go beyond mere reading promotion or parenting support, and can even be seen as community building. Bookstart is expected to grow and develop further in many regions.

Research Report

Part I

How Reading Books Together Affects Babies, Caregivers, and Parent-Child Relationships

I.1 Introduction

In Part I of this report, we examine what actually occurs when we open a picture book with a baby. What can we observe in the baby, and what might the caregiver discover and feel? What does this experience accomplish for the baby, the caregiver, and the parent-child relationship?

To pursue answers to these questions, we needed to closely examine rich moments of sharing picture books with babies. We proceeded as follows.

From December 2011 through March 2012, we requested the cooperation of parents and carers who read picture books with infants regularly and find this time to be rich with discoveries.

We asked these parents and carers to help us collect their experiences by writing freely about episodes of reading with baby (up to about age two). During each episode, what back-and-forth communication, what realizations on the part of the reader, what feelings, what thoughts, and what dreams were observed?

To search for cooperating caregivers, we contacted library staff and healthcare professionals involved in Bookstart in various regions of Japan, as well as acquaintances of Bookstart Japan staff whom we thought might fit the above criteria. We also involved Bookstart Japan staff themselves, thereby identifying a total of 20 people willing to

observe and record for us. We verbally explained to them the purpose of this research and our needs, and we followed up with them later in writing.

In addition, we surveyed some 3,245 parents and carers who were eligible to access Bookstart programming in seven cities around Japan. (The results of this survey comprise Part II of this report.) Parents' and carers' free comments on Bookstart's survey were also used as a source of episodes for this Part I analysis.

Furthermore, we used the below as episode sources:

- A) Manuscripts submitted to the "Picture Book Moment" column in Bookstart Newsletter, a publication of Bookstart Japan. The column invites parents and carers to describe picture book time with their babies and introduce a favorite book.
- B) Reader reviews of infant picture books published on several publishers' websites, a picture book information website, etc.²

The process for analyzing episodes was as follows: We read the caregivers' reflections, paying close attention to aspects relevant to our research theme. We grouped similar reflections together under "main topics" generated by our reading. After that, we named and defined the main topics, listed examples, and began our theoretical analysis on "analysis worksheets."

Here is an example of a main topic generated by our process.

While reading the episodes, several comments such as these were found: "the two of us seemed to agree, 'it came out *jaajaa-biribiri*, didn't it?'" "we had fun putting our parent-child label on things: 'it's that, get it?'" "afterward, when I wanted my daughter to scoot over, I would say, 'can you *piipii-back up* for me?'—it's become family lexicon." We grouped these episodes and formulated the main topic, "Understanding due to having shared a picture book world."

We went on to define this topic: "Elements specific to a shared picture book such as illustrations, words, or character actions come to hold special meaning, clear only to those who shared the book. When rereading the book, or even when not actually reading it, this shared 'insider knowledge' is enjoyed."

Once a number of main topics had emerged, we grouped the topics into categories; considered relationships among topics and categories; and summed up our work.³

² Episodes described on websites were used with permission of the reviewers, whom we contacted via the website administrators.

³ Regarding methods for qualitative analysis, we consulted the books *Live Lecture: What is Qualitative Research? SCQRM Basic* (Shinyosha, 2007) and *Live Lecture: What is Qualitative Research? SCQRM Advanced* (Shinyosha, 2008) by Takeo Saijo.

After this step, we asked for additional input from Dr. Hiroko Sasaki whose research over many years has focused on connections between picture books and the developmental psychology of infants. What conclusions could we draw from the portraits of babies and carers, and of parent-child relationships, which we had gathered? Dr. Sasaki provided an invaluable perspective, as someone who deeply respects the individuality of each child, and as someone who can objectively yet warmly observe parent-child relationships.

For each episode description, we expressed the child's name in phonetics (not in ideograms that would identify the individual). We listed each adult observer—whether a specially engaged participant, a newsletter contributor, or a website contributor—as: Name in phonetics, relationship to child, child's place in birth order/gender. We listed adults who responded to the free writing portion of the survey as: Survey respondent, city (A–G), relationship to child, child's place in birth order.

In cases where the title of a book used in an episode was clear, but not written, we added the title.

For this English edition of our report, we have added photos and simple introductions of the books mentioned. Japan is home to many picture books published especially for babies and small toddlers, and we hope to share about just a few of them.

In addition, in cases where we knew the child's age (in months or years), we included it with the episode. The stage at which infants exhibit particular responses varies by individual. The depth of adult-child communication also varies widely case to case. While a number of the narratives we collected had points in common, there were also some experiences reported by no more than one parent-child pair.

The purpose of Part I is not to elucidate patterns common for children of similar ages sharing books with parents, or to give rules for how different books can or should be shared. We observed as many diverse ways of “sharing books” as there were adult-child pairs. Some book sharing led to a sense of universality; some gave a clear sense of possibility around what picture book sharing can accomplish. We described key findings without regard to infant age or how many cases matched one another.

The book sharing that unfolds between each carer and child is unique. Indeed, as regards research on what sharing books accomplishes, it is possible that the more episodes one collects, the more new topics one could amass. This analysis conveys many aspects of what this practice can bring about, but we do not offer it as exhaustive.

Below, we report on what sharing books can accomplish for *babies, caregivers, and parent-child relationships*, with our discoveries from the reported episodes grouped under five categories:

- 1) Enriching the bonding process
- 2) Joys from sharing picture books
- 3) Support in parenting
- 4) Moments to pass down
- 5) Proof that we were alive together

I.2 Findings and Analysis

A) Enriching the bonding process

Newborns cannot talk or move as they wish; they may seem to do little but cry, so it is hard to know their thoughts. But in two to three years, not only do their bodies develop, but they also begin to speak meaningfully and to engage in conversation. They grow to empathize and enjoy rich, even fun communication.

In these few years when infants grow at jaw-dropping speed, carers and others come to know them and puzzle out how to relate to them, forming new bonds with these new humans from scratch.

Our analysis showed that sharing picture books enriched this bonding process with enjoyment, delight, surprise, and awe.

① What it means to open a picture book with a baby

A newborn's sense of hearing is fairly well developed, but its eyes—though they see—are said not to focus well. What meaning is there, then, in opening picture books with newborns? They will not be experiencing the picture book's world as we do.

Babies do, however, begin to show subtle reactions to illustrations that they see and the voice that they hear. The episodes below show carers realizing this and interacting with the babies in quiet wonder, as if exploring a totally new world.

◆Episode

I read *Can I Poo by Myself?* (Yuichi Kimura; Kaiseisha) to my first son at age three months. When I exaggerated the *mmm, mmm* pushing sound, my son said *mmm* with me two or three times. I was so surprised!

—Ms. Kobayashi, mother, first child/male



Front

Facing Pages

Can I Poo by Myself? (*Hitori de unchi dekiru kana*) 1989
A fun flap book all about succeeding on the potty or toilet.

◆Episode

When my second son was about five months old, we read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Eric Carle, trans. Hisashi Mori; Kaiseisha). My son put his face close to the strawberry and licked it! On the food pages, he would grip the book with both hands, make chewing motions, and drool. I had not yet started weaning him from breastmilk, but he always drooled when seeing food at our house. I was surprised that he also reacted to food in the book!

—Ms. Kobayashi, mother, second child/male



Front

The Very Hungry Caterpillar (*Harapeko aomushi*) 1976
Global bestseller first published in the US in 1969.
Vivid illustrations and pages with holes intrigue even babies.

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

Early Childhood Researcher and Professor Emerita, Naruto University of Education

Many first-time parents perceive that newborn babies “cry, feed, and repeat.” And it’s true that crying, feeding, and diaper changes take up most of a newborn’s waking hours! But if parents can find some moments in which to notice, Wow, babies are amazing! I believe that it profoundly affects the child-rearing experience.

When we take babies into nature and show them objects that change, babies open their eyes wide and show us what interests them. When we offer them soothing words and songs face-to-face, and model gestures, and share smiles and comforting rhythms, they respond. It is in this way that not-yet-verbal babies begin to communicate.

Unfortunately, in our current times, it seems the passing-down of such nurturing ways has been interrupted. The role that nursery rhymes and chants once played seems to have been taken up in part, however, by picture books. Picture books for babies often include onomatopoeia, don’t they? And soft, singable, rhythmic words. These books may depart from traditional rhymes, but they offer prose with its own fresh beats and melodies, and stimulating art, and I believe that they provide a valuable path for parent-baby communication.

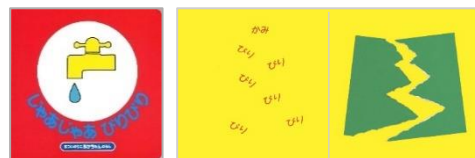
It is not the case, of course, that “earlier is always better” when it comes to picture books. Every baby is an individual and needs lots of experiences and direct, playful interactions while still little. So I don’t get hung up on the exact timing of “when baby should meet picture books.”

A baby who once listened intently to a voice and showed subtle reactions, will gradually begin to engage actively with books. Accordingly, the adult reader will begin to notice what about the books interests and appeals to the baby—and what doesn’t—and to imagine more ways to delight the baby. The adult will be linking illustrations (lines, shapes, colors), language, voice, and reading styles with the baby’s reactions, and working hard to understand the infant. Such expressions of *I want to know you* are the root of communication.

◆Episode

One afternoon, I sat on the couch holding Akihiko and read him *Gush, Gush, Rip, Rip* (Noriko Matsui; Kaiseisha). It was the first time I read him a book, so I was excited as I turned the pages. He listened to me with a very serious expression. Then, when I got to the “airplane, zoom zoom” part, he said, “Ah!” I thought, *Does he like the airplane? Does he like the sound zoom zoom?* I repeated the page, but he didn’t react the second time.

—Ms. Makita, mother, third child/male



Front

Facing Pages

Gush, Gush, Rip, Rip (Jaajaa biribiri) 1983

Items that babies meet in real life appear in clear colors and shapes with just-right onomatopoeia. Tiny enough for tots to hold.

◆Episode

Just before she turned nine months, I read my daughter *Toto Kek-koh! It's Morning!* (illustrations by Setsuko Mashima, text by Emiko Kobayashi; Kogumasha), and she excitedly said *oooo* and raised her hands at the part that says, “Good morning, Rooster!” I was amazed at how well she was listening to the story and following the illustrations, and I got excited to read more picture books to her.

—Ms. Ono, mother, first child/female



Front

Facing Pages

Toto Kek-koh! It's Morning! (*Toto kek-koh yo ga aketa*) 2005

A rooster crows to awaken baby animals.

Based on a Japanese nursery rhyme, or *warabe uta*.

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

Sharing books with babies is so much more than just reading the story, isn't it? When we communicate with others, we never say only our side. It's the same when sharing books. Babies watch and listen to the books and react in different ways; adult readers receive and respond to that. I think that's really key.

An adult reader may realize, “Hmm, she looks hard at this illustration but not the others,” or, “She didn’t react this way at five months, but at ten months, she’s changed!” What manner of speaking best encourages the little one to respond, and how does she respond, and why? Adult readers begin to consider these angles as they present the book.

And as they do so again and again, mothers, fathers, grandparents, daycare teachers and others come to see, “This is how this child thinks and feels,” or, “This is what’s happening on the inside.” In other words, they come to know the child’s imagination and individuality.

Spending time with babies essentially means making these discoveries and empathizing and sympathizing. It’s crucial to catch on to who children are when we parent. If we cannot discover who they are, I worry that children can come to seem like nothing more to us than time-consuming, noisy little creatures.

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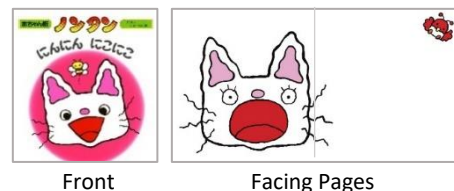
② The joy of realizing, “She got it!” “He understood!”

When a baby reaches the point of always responding to certain parts of a book, it’s a thrill for the adult reader. Something the adult put in motion has drawn a clear response and delighted the child! This makes the adult want to read the book aloud again.

◆Episode

When I was a new mom, the first books I read to my son at a few months of age were *Nontan* books (Sachiko Kiyono; Kaiseisha), which we had at home . . . At a surprising part in one, where I read *oo-hyaah*, my son chortled! I must have sounded silly. Anyway, I wanted to hear his laugh again, so I remember reading the same thing over and over!

—Ms. Mizusawa, mother, first child/male

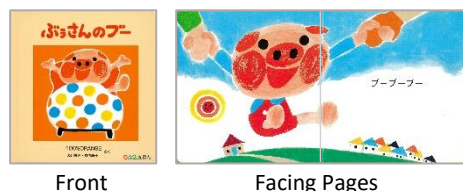


Nontan's Silly Smiles (*Nontan ninnin nikoniko*) 1987
A baby book in the beloved Nontan series. Cute Nontan's many expressions plus rhythmical language will have tots calling out!

◆Episode

When Sakie was eight to ten months old, we would read her *Oink* (100%ORANGE; Fukuinkan Shoten) every day and every night, whenever we had the time . . . Eager to see the piglet that filled a whole spread, Sakie would restlessly try to turn pages, as if saying, "Hurry, hurry!" When the piglet finally appeared, she would beam and say *oo-gii!* and laugh! We wanted to hear that laugh so much that my husband and I competed to read *Oink* to her.

—Ms. Asano, mother, first child/female

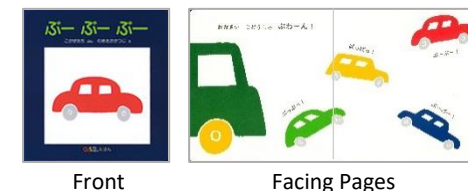


Oink (*Bu-san no buu*) 2005
Vivid, colorful, motion-filled illustrations show the daily doings of a piglet, Bu-san. This picture book exudes childlike energy.

◆Episode

In the second half of *Beep Beep, Yeah!* (Sachi Kokaze and Katsuji Wakisaka; Fukuinkan Shoten) a truck appears. Before my son and I got to this truck page, he would always hunker down as if preparing for the truck's noise. It was so funny to watch him do this, that I would read it again and again!

—Survey respondent, city D, mother, first child



Beep Beep, Yeah! (*Buu buu buu*) 2007
Cars of all colors and shapes toot buu-buu, pah-pah as they drive by. The sounds are easy to say, and easy for baby to hear.

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

Dynamic picture book illustrations and onomatopoeic text can get a baby very excited. The vocal sounds and rhythms the reader makes can cause him to respond (co-act) with his whole body! This clear response gives the grown-up hints for next time and can lead to new rhythms, new melodies. Sharing books with babies is a truly mutual process of give-and-take and grooving together.

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A baby's first year is a time when communication can be hit-and-miss, as carers wonder, "Does he understand?" "Does she get it?" After all, a baby cannot yet confirm meaning with words. But this makes the moments of realizing, "Ah! He understood!" or "Oh! She got it!" all the sweeter. Such experiences leave a deep impression and are surprisingly moving.

◆Episode

Early on when we read *A Book of Cars* (Tadayoshi Yamamoto; Fukuinkan Shoten), my son would recognize regular cars as "Papa's" but also say "Papa" for taxis, so I would tell him, "No, these cars have a square thing on their heads, so they're taxis."

I said this during my son's babyhood without really expecting that he would understand, but once he was a year old, every time we said "taxi," he would tap his head with his hands. *Why?* we wondered. Then, I realized I had told him about taxis with something on their heads, while tapping on his head.

For the first time in my life, I was completely astounded. Something I had only wondered if he'd heard, if he'd understood, had gotten through. He hadn't been able to say so in words, but once he grew, it was like he informed me, "Hey, I was listening, you know."

—Ms. Koda, mother, first child/male



A Book of Cars (Zukan jidosha) 1981

An encyclopedia-like picture book showing different automobiles in detail.
Photo-realistic but warm; a long seller popular with kids.

◆Episode

When my son was about one, we gathered *shiso* leaves together outdoors. Then he went by himself to the bookshelf, took out a book, and opened it to a page about *shiso* leaves! I was so moved to see that he had understood, and so well! that I was speechless and even grew tearful.

—Ms. Ozawa, mother, first son/male

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

As in the taxi example, there are times when we wonder, “What is this child doing?”—and then suddenly, we get it! And we find that the child’s activity can only be understood by someone who has read picture books with him. That makes our amazement even more profound, doesn’t it?

I think it’s crucial for parents to have these epiphanies and taste this amazement. Parents, after all, are discovering how little beings called children process their world in the different stages of babyhood and toddlerhood. Adults’ learning can even lead to awe that shoots through the whole body! This is the magic of babies’ first and second year.

These experiences also train adult readers of picture books to take in the world through children’s eyes. The things children do can remind adults of their own life paths—and may even give them the joy of living life over again, with the child.

③ Understanding due to having shared a picture book world

Babies gradually begin to interact actively with adult readers, showing that they enjoy reading books together. Moments of shared recognition (“Hey, that’s just like that!”) give babies special pleasure. Through sharing these moments, baby and adult come to enjoy true mutual communication.

◆Episode

I read *Beep Beep, Yeah!* so often, even memorizing it and quoting it outdoors, that my child began to point whenever he saw a red car or a blue car! He also realized that our TV remote had the same colors on it, and he brought the book over to show me. It was as if he was teaching me, “It’s the same!!” with all his might.

—Survey respondent, city D, mother, first child

◆Episode

When my daughter was about nine months, she began to point to things and say, “Ah! Ah!” when inside the house or on walks. I would answer, “That’s a toot-toot!” or, “That’s a bow-wow!” or, “That’s a gush-gush!” Without realizing it, the two of us were confirming with each other that certain things had also appeared in *Gush, Gush, Rip, Rip* (Noriko Matsui; Kaiseisha).

—Ms. Ichihara, mother, first child/female

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

With media other than picture books, small children don’t really need another person. They can press a button or play alone. But to explore the world of a picture book fully, they have to have the involvement of someone else. They have to have a big person read aloud in their own voice and enter the same world as the child. Because of this, the child can relax and know, “This person gets it, too.” The person reading is often also someone who shares life experiences with the child, who can relate them to the book in endless ways. This makes it so interesting!

Experiences shared while reading a picture book can also lead to play that only the adult reader and child understand. The book’s illustrations, words, and actions may take on special meanings to the two, and this itself makes the time spent sharing the book, and time spent without the book, even more special.

◆Episode

My daughter’s favorite part of *Jump!* (Tatsuhide Matsuoka; Poplar) is where it says, “The snail . . . can’t jump.” She and I would fall over and be silly there, so even after she turned one and began running around, there were times when we would say, “The snail . . .” and just flop down as if to respond, “can’t jump.”

—Ms. Ichihara, mother, first child/female

◆Episode

At the end of *Go Go Momon-chan* (Kazuhiko Toyota; Doshinsha) there's a scene where the little girl leaps into her mother's arms to the sound of *do-o-on*. My daughter and I both loved this, and even now that she's six, if I stretch out my arms while standing at a distance, she'll race to me saying *do-o-on*.

—Ms. Ichihara, mother, first child/female



Go Go Momon-chan (*Dondoko Momon-chan*) 2001

Little Momon-chan runs to a rhythmic beat over a bridge, up a hill, smack into a bear, and straight into her mother's arms.

◆Episode

After my daughter turned two, we read *Little Onion* (Keiko Sena; Kinnohoshisha). On the page where the mouse appears in the kitchen, there is no text, but the first time we read it, we *looked* at each other. After that, every time we reread it, we would *look* at each other there as if saying, “Ah! There's the mouse!”

—Ms. Takezawa, mother, second child/female



Little Onion (*Chiisana tamanegi-san*) 1977

Familiar kitchen tools and vegetables are the main characters in this collage picture book. The funny story draws in even adults.

◆Episode

Out in our yard, when I said to try digging with a shovel, our daughter said, “Like Baby Bear?” This was delightful, like a secret sign of our relationship due to sharing picture books. I was also amazed that she'd connected so strongly with a scene in a book.

—Ms. Kusano, mother, first child/female

◆Episode

When our daughter was about a year and three months, we began reading *Beep, Beep, I'm Backing Up* (Ken Katayama; Fukuinkan Shoten). As the animals say “beep” and back up in the book, they draw crayon lines. My husband liked this and would read it in a trademark way, so our daughter always smiled and enjoyed it.

One day when she was getting surer on her feet, my husband asked her to change location, saying, “Come over here, Micchan!” She did not move, even when he asked several times. Then he tried saying, “Micchan, please beep and back up!” and she moved instantly. After this, asking someone to “beep and back up” became like family code. Even now that our daughter can say the same thing other ways, she will still say to me, “Mama, please beep and back up.”

—Ms. Kuwata, mother, first child/female



Beep, Beep, I'm Backing Up (*Piipii bakku shimaasu*) 2010 Out of stock

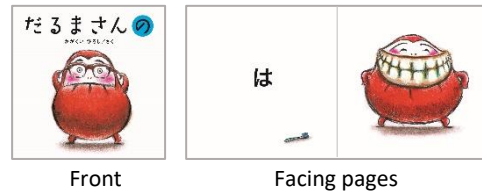
While backing up and drawing a line on the ground, thud! Somebody bumps. Animals' fun antics invite imitation.

◆Episode

On my daughter's first birthday, her daycare center gave her the book *Daruma-san's* (Hiroshi Kagakui; Bronze Shinsha) which was often read aloud at daycare. We opened it together right away . . . what glee! On the pages showing Daruma-san's hand, teeth, and hair, my daughter showed me her own palm, opened wide to show me her teeth, and reached up to touch her hair; she tried to say the names of all of these, her voice growing louder and louder.

The last page almost shows Daruma-san's rear end, but then asks—does a Daruma doll have a rear end? I watched for my daughter's reaction, thinking she might point to her rear, but she didn't. Instead, she shook her head. “What didn't she like?” I wondered, as I started to read the book again. Once more, when we reached the last page, she shook her head. Finally, I realized that she meant, “No, he doesn't have one!” I confirmed, “No rear end, right?” and she looked at me with the smuggest expression. I guess at daycare, shaking heads and saying “none, none!” was what they always did on that page.

—Ms. Ono, mother, first child/female



Daruma-san's (Daruma-san no) 2008

Part of a series about a good-luck Daruma doll, which gets kids having fun with their whole bodies. Unique, charming illustrations.

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

Keeping a secret with someone is an early way to experience mutual understanding. The secret might be kept at first with only a mother or a father, and then spread to a sibling, grandmother, or grandfather, and even become family code like, "Please beep and back up!" Beyond that, the sharing can include friends or new people one meets. Children in daycares and preschools can experience this in a group. In this way, a child's world expands greatly. In cases where a child has a group experience that she brings home, it must happen often that the adults at home don't know what a child means at first!

Picture books bring about a phenomenon called joint attention, in which one person takes interest in something because it interests the other, and vice versa. This is the very foundation of cooperation, which is critical to humanity. Each person absorbs someone else's thinking and offers their own.

When we open picture books with babies, they look at the books and at our faces, don't they? Looking hard at the adult reader's reactions, they are taking in human emotion and figuring out how the world works. If the person reading with them says, "This is silly!" and laughs, they may feel secure that it's OK to laugh here—or they may think this stuff makes this person laugh, but I don't think it's funny! Human expressions of sadness, anger, surprise, disappointment, and humor are not innate; they must be taught, and they are terribly important.

The ability for a parent and child, a family, and a local community to find meaning in common things is important for society. Where we find meaning will differ by culture, of course. Babies are at the absolute beginning of learning all of society's codes, signals, information, and signs via their physical bodies. The picture book is one of the most enjoyable tools we have to help them share more in common with other people, and to grow able to cooperate.

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④ When the picture book world and the real world connect

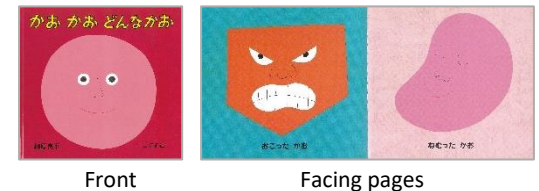
A slightly older baby will move between the picture book world and the real world, almost as if no border divides them. While playing with the baby, the reader will observe and ponder, "How must the world appear to this child right now?"

◆Episode

While we were doing other things, I would sometimes quote a phrase from a picture book, and my daughter would go get it . . . If she did something naughty and I got stern and said "angry face," she would go get *Face, Face, Which Face?* (Ryohei Yanagihara; Kogumasha).

It was interesting to see her take in a phrase, suddenly understand, and then go get the book.

—Ms. Ishigami, mother, first child/female



Face, Face, Which Face? (Kao kao donna kao) 1988

Angry face, ornery face, happy face, concerned face.

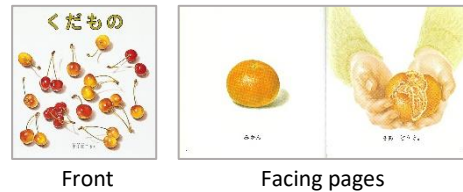
Faces with different expressions fill up the pages, fascinating babies.

◆Episode

Shortly after my daughter turned one . . . I thought it was interesting how she started to connect the picture book world and the real world. For example, when we read *Fruits* (Kazuko Hirayama; Fukuinkan Shoten) and saw a *mikan* orange in the book, she went to the next room and got a real *mikan*, as if to say, "It's this thing, right?" When we read *What Appears From Inside the Eggs?* (Toshiko Kanzawa and Genichiro Yagyu; Fukuinkan Shoten) and said the phrase "come on out," she beckoned with her hands as if to say "come!" She was linking the everyday and picture book worlds.

Once, when we read *Polar Bear's Pancakes* (Hisashi Mori, Yoshiomi Wada, Ken Wakayama; Kogumasha), she said, "This is Mama's," and I wondered what she meant. It turned out that the vase in the book was the same color and shape as my mug!

—Ms. Kusano, mother, first child/girl



Fruits (Kudamono) 1981

Fresh fruits are illustrated just like the real thing.

When the reader says “Here you go!” babies drool and reach out their hands!

◆Episode

Watching my daughter, I notice that her enjoyment doubles when life experiences make her familiar with an item in a book, such as when we eat a banana and then find a banana in a picture book. Due to this, I’ve been trying to give her as many real experiences of things she discovers in books as I can. For example, after she saw a penguin in a picture book, I took her to the aquarium, and after she saw a seesaw in a picture book, I took her to the park to try a seesaw. When a watermelon appeared in a picture book, we went to buy a watermelon at the greengrocer’s. Before my daughter could talk, all of this mainly felt good to me, but now that she speaks, she’ll point at a cat in a book and remark that the kitty we saw on a walk was “so cute,” or she’ll remember the time at the greengrocer’s and ask, “Are they all out of watermelons?”

—Ms. Kuwata, mother, first child/daughter

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

Children often react to words from picture books that come up in conversation, don’t they? Or at the supermarket, they’ll point to a food they saw in a book, as if to say, “There it is!” This happens not just with words, but also with daily activities.

It’s as if children’s neurons are connecting right there in front of us, as they link book to book and items within books (images, words, conditions) to items in the real world. It’s not that they are accessing imagination and reality at will; rather, it’s as if they enter into a complex fabric woven of the two.

As adults watch children do this, full of life, they join in and the picture books begin to expand everyone’s imaginations. Even if children are just over a year old, they can forget the here and now and get lost in a book, placing themselves within it. When you think about it, that’s an amazing thing to be able to do!

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⑤ Discovering a child’s individuality

Through sharing books, the adult reader has the opportunity to pick up on aspects of the infant’s personality. Even a tiny baby is an individual, distinct from siblings and the reader.

◆Episode

When my son was a year and two months old, he would often pull out *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, but not for an adult to read. He would sit by himself and look at it. I was surprised, because his older sister had always been the type to beg me, “Read! Read!”

—Ms. Doi, mother, first child/female, second child/male

◆Episode

I Love Shampoo; Can I Poo by Myself?; Can You Reply? and Fun Brushing Teeth (Yuichi Kimura; Kaiseisha) . . . each of these books has a flap on every page. My daughter would always scrupulously return the flap to its original position before moving on. I had thought she was more relaxed about such things than her brother, but this behavior showed me I was incorrect.

—Ms. Takezawa, mother, first child/male, second child/female

◆Episode

My daughter would often bring a picture book that I myself would not have chosen, saying, “Read!” And she did not react with as much delight as I expected to books that I liked, or to bestsellers. Watching her, I reflected that I needed to look beyond what is generally judged to be “good”—and beyond my own tastes—and value her perspective and individuality.

—Ms. Kuwata, mother, first child/female

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

In Japan, I think we tend to want our child to be the same as the child next door. We want what is “normal,” and we compare our child with others. And we often define discipline or education as making children do what adults say. The idea of affirming children as individuals and communicating with them as such, is not really emphasized.

But even small babies are humans with distinct ways of looking and thinking. Some babies won’t drink formula unless it’s almost hot, while others like it tepid. Some babies sleep soundly at night, while others get hungry and cry several times. Second or third children act differently as babies than their older siblings did.

When we share picture books, we sometimes notice that a baby responds differently than we expected. It's as if they're telling us, "I didn't feel that way about it," or, "I didn't interpret it like you did." A child may dislike a book that a parent likes, or vice versa. This can lead to discoveries: "This child tends to act this way." "Wow, this one's really different than big brother."

And this is neither good nor bad; it's nothing to do with norms of our time. Rather than pushing the norms of today on our children—after all, norms will change in a few decades—we can maintain a respectful distance, believing that if children make their own choices, they will develop their own new norms. We can walk with them on that journey.

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Some babies are not interested in picture books. There are babies who love picture books instantly, babies who grow to like them later, and babies who remain indifferent to them. Even these cases show how picture books help us discover aspects of babies' individuality.

◆◆Episode.....

When our baby was born, I planned to share lots of picture books with him, and I read to him often until he began to crawl. But now that he's able to move on his own, he seems to have lost interest. He often turns me down when I offer to read a book. He seems to enjoy playing with toys more.

—Ms. Mori, mother, first child/male

◆◆Episode.....

At a year and seven months, my son still doesn't respond much to picture books. He will randomly turn the pages or shut the book in the middle, so I can't read to him for long. He even tears the pages. Since reading a story page-by-page doesn't work right now, we're dipping into lots of animal books without storylines.

—Survey respondent, city D, mother, first child

◆◆Episode.....

I think read-aloud is important and have always been keen on it. But my baby showed zero interest and really only chewed the books until the age of a year and four months. I wanted to use books to communicate with him but found myself reading alone, and I got dispirited. Starting at a year and six months, my child would bring books for me to read but then tire of them quickly.

—Survey respondent, city C, mother, first child

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki.....

We often have a sense that it's better to read books than not, possibly because we associate books with knowledge and usefulness. We want our children to read.

We also expect sometimes that, "If children meet this book at this time, they'll grow up in this way," or, "If we start reading to them earlier, they'll be able to talk earlier and read on their own earlier." We see them as all climbing the same set of stairs, I think. But children do not follow one route.

"My child loved picture books in toddlerhood but stopped reading in grade school." I hear this often, and I also hear of people who didn't meet books as infants who adore them as adults. Books are not something that we must start reading early, and if we don't we'll fall behind, and if we don't it'll be bad.

If we read books to babies with the ultimate goal of making them into readers, we're going to hit a wall. With babies, picture books are just one fun tool that we can use to enrich the parent-child bond. We need to relax and let that be all we're trying to do when we share books together.

Naturally, there will be children who dislike picture books, or who are indifferent. These children may be seeking a more immediate type of stimulus in their lives. Some children play intently with blocks, some children love music, and some children enjoy pretend play with stuffed animals. This is their individuality.

Small children have the capacity to choose whether or not to read a book. I think we need to believe in them by allowing for this. Sharing books is only one way we can respond to a little one who is surveying many options and saying, "Let's look at this!" Picture book sharing is not something to force.

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B) New joys from sharing picture books

Sharing books with children can infuse parenting with many joys. The act of opening a picture book and enjoying its world together can make a day and, over time, many days, just that little bit happier. In this section, we note some kinds of delight that are particularly accessible through the medium of the picture book.

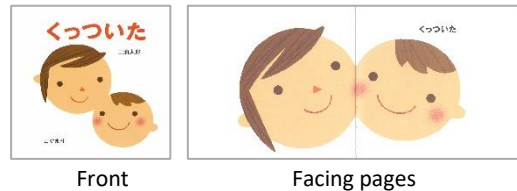
① Enjoyment of back-and-forth

There are many ways to enjoy a picture book with an infant besides just opening it up and reading. Particularly during the stage before the book's meaning becomes accessible to the child, back-and-forth communication via the book becomes key. This back-and-forth lends variety to our ways of being with baby.

◆Episode

We received *Stuck Together* (Taro Miura; Kogumasha) from Bookstart. Our interactions grew to include lots of hand-squeezing, kisses, and pressing cheeks together.

—Survey respondent, city F, mother, first child



Stuck Together (Kutsuita) 2005

Simple illustrations and rhythmic text show different animal pairs “stuck together.” The end shows baby and adult stuck—let’s try it!

◆Episode

When we read *Gush, Gush, Rip, Rip* and I say “water,” my child will say *jaajaa*. When I say “train crossing,” my child will say *kankankan*. It’s not just about understanding—it’s about play between the two of us with words. It’s so much fun!

—Survey respondent, city B, mother, first child

◆Episode

We’ve read the book we got from Bookstart so many times that I can say it from memory at bedtime after darkening the room. My child will smile and clap at favorite phrases, surely imagining the illustrations even though not looking at them. I feel like we’ve discovered another great thing about picture books.

—Survey respondent, city D, mother, first child

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

The more we set children free, the more they show us who they are and say and do intriguing things. Even small children will express feelings, experiences, and thoughts

in ways possible at their age. It’s fun to be around them doing this! When we share picture books with them, we get to enjoy lots of these moments.

② Happiness at being a dad

Fathers tend to spend less time with children than mothers, but it seems that sharing picture books helps them to experience the joys of parenthood.

◆Episode

Picture books are really helping father-child communication at our house. When Daddy comes home, our child brings the book and plops in his lap to be read to right away.

—Survey respondent, city D, mother, first child

◆Episode

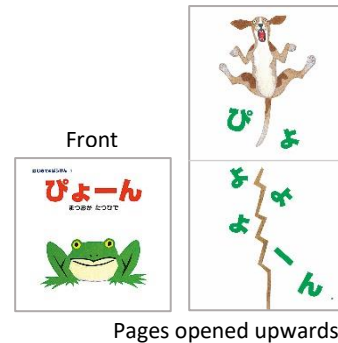
Papa doesn’t get to play with our daughter much on weekdays. But when they open up their favorite picture books together, they’re whisked away into a world all their own and having a great time.

—Ms. Doi, mother, first child/female

◆Episode

That night when we read *Jump!* and I said “the frog . . . jumps!” I raised the book high over my daughter’s head at the word “jumps!” She cackled as she looked up at the frog. Next, I read “the cat . . . jumps!” and she did the exact same thing! I got into it too then, and when we turned the next page, I held the book way up high and read, “The dog goes . . . boioioioioing!” She cackled *kya-ha-ha-ha!* and turned all the way over on the futon. When I remember that time, no matter what I’m going through, I grin.

—Mr. Doi, father, first child/female



Jump! (Pyo-on) 2000

A small book that opens upward. A succession of still creatures jump mightily when pages are turned, filling entire spreads!

◆Episode

When we read *Peek-a-Boo* (Miyoko Matsutani and Yasuo Segawa; Doshinsha) and I said, “Peek-a,” she answered, “Boo!” That was our first conversation. When she said “bow-wow” and pointed to the illustration of a dog, that was the first time she communicated with me using a word. For dads who only get to see their kids in the evenings, read-aloud is a great way to these “firsts.”

—Mr. Hashimoto, father, first child/female



Peek-a-Boo (Inai inai baa) 1967

The fun of peek-a-boo comes through with partial sentences that require a page turn—boo! A forerunner among books for babies, this classic reached 7 million copies in print in November 2020.

◆ ◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

I’m interested in the statement by the dad who read *Jump!*—“When I remember that time, no matter what I’m going through, I grin.” I wonder what exactly led to this. Was it the joy of making his daughter happy? The joy of seeing her so happy that she turned right over? The awe at feeling something from the bottom of their hearts? I sense that

he is expressing something deep here—it’s not just that he thinks his child is cute. It’s as if the experience has lit a fire under him that keeps him going in his life.

I think the elemental joy gained in interactions like this is what has kept humanity going all this time, despite fighting, wars, and persecution. “If I can just have this in my life, I can live on!” This changes everything and completely widens our worlds, I think.

There are times when we receive this elemental energy even from small, pre-verbal babies. We almost want to tell them, “Thank you for letting me raise you. Spending time with you has given my life a whole new meaning.” The father in the above example is unintentionally expressing exactly that, I think.

③ Growth in both child and adult

It is easy to miss small signs of growth in babies in daily life, but books can help us spot these signs and remember them. Especially when it comes to linguistic, cognitive, and emotional growth, picture books can help us see even subtle changes.

◆Episode

Through picture books, I learned that my child knew numbers, colors, and living creatures. I could clearly sense the growth.

—Survey respondent, city D, mother, first child

◆Episode

At first our child only listened to books, but as the months passed, listening turned to laughing, turning pages, and mimicking actions!

—Survey respondent, city E, mother, first child

◆Episode

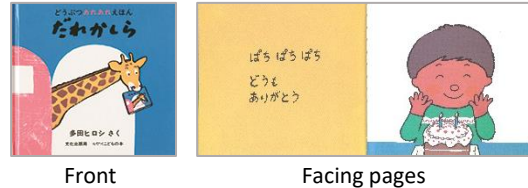
Lately . . . my daughter will open a book and mutter, “There were Little Daruma and Little Kaminari. Roarrrr, the lightning struck!” She’ll act as if she’s reading the book, which makes me laugh. Also, if I’m reading and make a mistake, she’ll say, “That’s wrong!” I’m amazed by how well she remembers and how she’s grown.

—Ms. Kusano, mother, first child/female

◆Episode

At eleven months I read her *Who Is It?* (Hiroshi Tada; Bunka Shuppankyoku), and she began clapping at the *clap-clap-clap* part. She showed through actions that she understood the book.

—Ms. Tsuchiya, mother, first child/female



Front

Facing pages

Who Is It? (Dare kashira) 1972

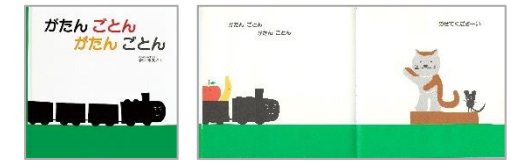
Upon hearing a knock and opening the door, one finds animals arriving with birthday gifts! A fun book about welcoming guests.

Sometimes, picture books bring not only fun and chances for children to grow, but also opportunities for adults to reflect.

◆Episode

One book we added to our shelves right after our daughter's birth was *Chug Chug Train* (Mizumaru Anzai; Fukuinkan Shoten). Before our daughter turned one, she showed very little interest in it. But by the time she was about a year and seven or eight months, this book was a big hit . . . This is just a guess, but around the same time, she began to have more chances to see and ride trains, so I think they were more familiar to her. It was interesting how her response to the same book changed in tandem with her growth . . . And now that she's two and good at talking, her imitations of me *reading* the book are stopping me in my tracks. My ad-libs ("all right," "OK," and "after you" when the animals say "let me on!") come from her mouth sounding exactly like me! It shows me that she really pays attention to my words and actions, which is sobering.

—Ms. Kuwata, mother, first child/female



Front

Facing pages

Chug Chug Train (Gatan goton gatan goton) 1987

A steam train rolls down the track with rhythmical sounds. As each page turns, more passengers get on. A picture book with feel-good repetition.

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

If picture books are organized as a back-and-forth, children will literally "share" in telling the story. As children's memory develops, the back-and-forth grows more complex.

There is sharing with riddle-like text, and sharing when the text asks questions; there is sharing when we read picture books while comparing them to reality. The kinds of sharing can grow deeper and more numerous, to the point where the child surprises the adults with interpretive variations. The adult learns so much about the child's growth and individuality this way!

What's interesting about book sharing, is that the child also takes in the adult's unintended gestures and expressions and becomes able to mirror them, so that the adult suddenly sees him-/herself! This can make us blush or want to change our ways!

④ Joy in shared child-rearing

The process of child-rearing is also a process of parent-growing, and parenthood is far more fun when we share it with a partner. Together we watch our children, work with them, take pleasure in their growth, and share these pleasures as spouses. Sharing books with children gives parents a chance to observe each other, and such sharing also creates opportunities to enjoy child-rearing together.

◆Episode

Around the time Hiroshi became able to sit up, I read him *Peek-a-Boo*. He stared hard at the bear on the cover. We opened it and looked at the cat, the mouse, the bear . . . and then he reached out and grabbed the book! He turned back to the cover and touched the bear, and then returned to the page with the bear. I was so proud that he realized the bear

on the cover was the same as the bear inside!! I read it to him again, and he did the exact same thing. When my husband came home and I told him this, he said “really?” and didn’t seem interested. But then, later, when we were choosing clothes for our son at the store, my husband picked out clothes with bears on them. When I asked him why, he said, “Because he likes bears.” I thought, *So you’re super proud too.*

—Ms. Kobayashi, mother, second child/male

◆◆Episode

(Sometime after starting to read with baby at two months) our daughter was lying on her back and smiling and watching me as I read, and she vocalized as if trying to speak along with me. When both my husband and I praised her, she beamed so brightly!

—Ms. Suzuki, mother, first child/female

◆◆Episode

Recently when reading *Friends* (Helen Oxenbury; Bunka Shuppanyoku), my husband has been adding slow phrases with special intonation for our daughter, one year and two months: “Frie-e-ends with Rabbit,” “Frie-e-ends with Cat.” Our daughter will vocalize the ends of phrases with him, her head tilted to one side as she looks deep into his eyes, smiling. I love to watch them! When I read to her, I can’t always watch her expressions and movements, so this is my chance to be the audience.

—Ms. Ono, mother, first child/female



Front

Friends (Tomodachi) 1981

Quirky friends (animals) and a baby who greets each one.
Gentle illustrations feature a light touch. Small so baby can hold.

◆◆Episode

As each day flies by, the time we spend relaxed around a picture book is precious. The way we can listen to each other’s voices and interact at our own pace has very different benefits from TV. I have a photo I love, of my husband and daughter reading a picture book together and laughing. These smiling faces are the real pleasure in picture book sharing, I think.

—Ms. Kusano, mother, first child/female

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

In the vignette above where the mother thinks, So you’re super proud too, we see a father who seems indifferent but actually listens quite carefully. The mother can see he is making efforts in his own way, and the family bonds over a picture book.

While fathers might have all sorts of thoughts and feelings about their children, when they have limited time in which to share them, they don’t get to be the great dads they could be, which is unfortunate. Lately, some read-aloud circles and other initiatives for fathers have been taking off, and if support on blogs and Twitter increases, I believe that fathers’ interest in reading with small children will only accelerate. I think many mothers are waiting eagerly to see what happens when it does.

C) Support in parenting

Picture book moments with babies can be a great support to caregivers. There are times when books can calm infants like nothing else, and there are times when books can help adults to cope with child-rearing struggles. Above all, amid the rush of everyday life, books provide carers and babies with moments in which to visit another world.

① Tool to help parent and child relax

When babies are unhappy and will not stop crying, it sometimes happens that opening a picture book will soothe them.

◆◆Episode

It’s been two years since my child was born, and picture books have been with us the whole way. Now, when my daughter is sleepy or fussy, if I say, “Shall we read a book?” she perks up right away. It seems that these books are connected with peace in her heart.

—Ms. Maruyama, mother, first child/female

◆◆Episode

My child loved the book we received from Bookstart. If I read it when he cried or got into a foul mood, he would stop crying right away and get excited.

—Survey respondent, city B, mother, first child

◆Episode

When my baby daughter fusses and I can't seem to comfort her, I'll say, "Who's in it, who's in it?" and open the book *Who's in It?* (Akiko Hayashi, Fukuinkan Shoten). She will look steadily at the book, watch my hand turn the pages, chew the corner of a page, or whack it a bit with her hand, and then her smile will come back. This makes me feel better, too.

—Ms. Ichihara, mother, first child/female



Front Facing Pages

Who's in It? (Dete koi dete koi) 1998
"Somebody's hiding. Come out, come out!" At this, animals come out from behind colored paper. Beautiful colors, papercut-like art.

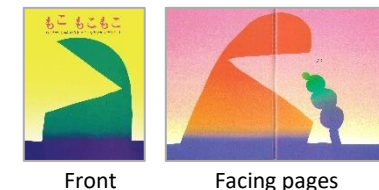
◆Episode

When my daughter suddenly starts crying and I can't comfort her, I'll try different things to change her mood, like taking her to the window, going outside, fanning her, singing to her, or squeezing a toy that squeaks. Sometimes I'll even give her "grown-up things" like my phone or keys. But picture books also help.

Once, I remember wanting to change the "scenery" she was seeing, so I got the slightly oversized, vividly colored book *Moko Mokokoko* (Shuntaro Tanikawa and Sadamasa Motonaga; Bunken Shuppan) and opened it for her suddenly. She stopped crying instantly, her attention focused on the book, and I felt so relieved: *Ah, it worked!*

Naturally, opening a picture book doesn't stop her crying every time, but looking at a new, colorful world and hearing words with rhythm really seems to help change her mood. I am sure that I will keep turning to picture books for help when she cries.

—Ms. Ono, mother, first child/female



Front Facing pages

Moko Mokokoko (Moko mokomoko) 1977
Oversize picture book featuring vivid art that fills the pages.
Oddly shaped beings change shape to the sound of onomatopoeia.

◆Episode

When my child fusses at bedtime, if I let her hear the words of a picture book that we have memorized, she will grow quiet. Rather than staying fussy, we can be calmed by the text we know from our time reading together. This is good for me too in lots of ways.
—Survey respondent, city B, mother, first child

As noted in the episode above, sharing books can soothe not only fussy babies but also caregivers, naturally bringing them back to a relaxed state.

◆Episode

When I'm irritable, if I read a picture book aloud, my child will smile. Seeing this, I will reflect on my anger and hug my little one tight. I think picture books are essential for our life.
—Survey respondent, city E, mother, second child

◆Episode

I was not good at reading books aloud, but for my child, I tried it bit by bit, once per day if possible, and got to where I enjoyed it, too. I realized that when reading aloud, I was more relaxed than at any other time. I may have thought that I was reading aloud for the child, but maybe it was more for me.
—Survey respondent, city D, mother, second child

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

It's true that when babies are fussy, opening a picture book can calm them down. It's like we're saying, "Let's get out of this un-fun world and start fresh in a new one, shall we?" Also, at times like when we have to take a child to the doctor, we often take a favorite book along, don't we? It's like we're saying, "OK, we're getting help

somewhere else, but we're taking something with us from home, so it's not so scary." It's interesting, isn't it, how the picture book can be a different world or a familiar world?

These changes-of-scene, so to speak, can often also come from a song or a toy (doll, stuffed animal, blocks, etc.). But picture books differ from those, in that these are tools an adult can easily share with the child. There's no taking-out or putting-away required—just a quiet opening, turning of pages, and closing. This time can really serve a special function for us.

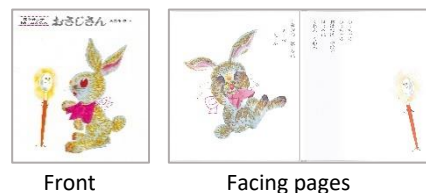
② Tool to facilitate self-reflection

When raising a child, all sorts of worries and difficulties arise. When the baby is tiny, growth and development are big concerns. When the baby is bigger, its relationships with siblings, the parent's work-life balance, and discipline can become issues. Sharing books can take us away from worry and stress, away from conflict and confusion, back toward ease and nonchalance. That is due in part to the silent self-reflection a caregiver can engage in, thanks to the picture book and its characters.

◆Episode

We began reading *Little Spoon* (Miyoko Matsutani and Kei Tokoji; Doshinsha) just after my daughter turned six months old, when I began feeding her solid foods. I read this book to her often, because she wasn't eating her solids very well. Looking back, I probably needn't have worried as much as I did, but at the time, as a new mom, I would grow anxious and panicky whenever I saw other children of the same age eating heartily. This lovely book soothed *me*, somehow making it so that even if my daughter ate only one bite, I could still say, "Ah, yummy!" and stroke her head.

—Ms. Ichihara mother, first child/female



Little Spoon (Osaji-san) 1969

Eating porridge with a spoon may be an everyday occurrence, but it can also be a mini story for children, as this book reminds us.

◆Episode

While not born underweight, my newborn did not grow quickly, and as a first-time parent, I found myself in a daily panic. I worried that my breastmilk was inadequate, and I stressed constantly about food and feeding. At first, I even forgot about the picture book I had received from Bookstart.

At about six months, however, I remembered the book and read it with my daughter. The moment I opened it, her eyes were glued to the pages. I distinctly recall noticing this . . .

For her first half-year of life, I had worried only about her growth on the outside, but after we started reading picture books, every time I read to her and watched her respond, it was as if scales fell from my eyes. She would point, say "ah ah," and even say the end of *Stuck Together* with me. Books became a part of her growing-up ever afterward.

—Ms. Okubo, mother, first child/female

◆Episode

Shunta did not usually show interest in picture books, but after he turned one, I decided to make them part of his bedtime routine. I wanted to get some use out of the picture books we had in the house, and I believed that if I got into bed and snuggled and read to Shunta slowly, he would settle down and drop off to sleep.

When I read to him, though, he got totally out of the mood to sleep! Instead, he grew more alert. I heard from somebody that I should try reading him a slow-paced book about sleep, so I purchased *Night Night, Kokko* (Ken Katayama; Fukuinkan Shoten).

The first several times I read this, Shunta listened quietly, but then he started not wanting it and soon, when I took it in my hand, he would say "not this book!" and throw it to the floor! The book may just not have suited his taste, but I think he probably sensed my scheme to get him to go to sleep. After that, I let him choose the book, no matter what it was. And I decided that even if he fell asleep late, I could only see him on mornings and evenings of weekdays, so I wanted to make bedtime enjoyable. I saw that if I used picture books only to teach him or to make him do things, that would be nothing but my adult ego at work.

—Ms. Mori, mother, first child/male

◆Episode

When I got home from my job, our house would always go into uproar. Life was crazy, and my irregular work schedule meant I had less time to spend with Koji . . . One day, after I read him *I Love Mama* (Michio Mado and Setsuko Mashima; Kogumasha) for the first time in a while, he looked through the book again by himself and stopped on the page where the mother feeds the chicks in the nest. Near the chicks are the words, “Ah, it’s Mama, it’s mama.” He might have loved that illustration because the backdrop behind the nest is green, his favorite color. But he kept looking mainly at that page . . . Lately, he will also enjoy other pages and books, but before he sleeps, the chick page is still what settles him. He will say “Maa-ma” while he looks at it. Is he saying to me, “Mama, lately you’re away a lot, but will you please always come home and be with me?” When I come home with supper in my shopping bag, I feel exactly like the mother bird in that book. While reading it, I tell myself, “We can do this. Together.”

—Ms. Watanabe, mother, first child/male



Front

Facing pages

I Love Mama (Mama daisuki) 2002

Snuggles between baby animals and their mothers come alive in colorful illustrations overflowing with warmth.

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

Picture books can really add to our understanding of children—and even provide opportunities to reflect on ourselves. This is because picture books, at their core, are messages from authors and illustrators to beloved children. Plus, with picture books that have been read globally for forty or fifty years, in different time periods, countries, languages and cultures, you know that countless families have cherished them and that they contain a certain universality, as well as a deep love of children.

These picture books also have deep things to say about parenting and marriage, and there are times when they’re more useful psychologically than the best parenting manual. Excellent picture books are not only for children, but also for those raising children and those trying to understand them, and for anyone in need of wise guidance about life, family, nature, love, and peace.

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D) Moments to pass down

After being read to as small children—sharing feelings with the adult who read to us and playing together in the same picture book world—we grow. And we begin to want to offer that same experience to others. When we have our own children, we may naturally take picture books in hand as parents.

◆Episode

As I was reading to my second son, my baby daughter Tomomi sat nearby and watched. Seeing her, my son declared, “I will read to you, Tomo-chan!” and dove right in. She was right at the age where cuddling her would make her smile, and her big brothers just adored reading to her.

—Ms. Tanikawa, mother, first and second child/male, third child/female

◆Episode

When my daughter read to her younger brother, she would ignore the idea of “reading from beginning to end in order, as written” and do whatever made him happy. She just loved it when her brother would beg her to read, and it thrilled her that something she had done had made him feel good, had gotten him to respond. It was magical to watch them share a book!

—Ms. Doi, mother, first child/female, second child/male

◆Episode

(When my first son and I went to stay with my parents for the birth of my second son,) my two-year-old elder son had his first experience staying alone overnight with his grandparents. Every night, he would say, “again, again!” and get his grandmother to read picture books to him until he fell asleep—to the point that her voice grew hoarse. When I was discharged from the hospital and brought the baby home, the first thing my elder son did for his brother was read him his favorite book. It was one that his grandmother had read him: *Tree Stump* (Miwa Nakaya; Kaiseisha). He actually had the three-book series in his arms as he waited at the front door for our arrival . . . my two-year-old still needed lots of attention, so I was worried about how he would interact with his brother, but when I saw him reading to the baby happily, I was so relieved that I teared up.

—Ms. Nakano, mother, first and second child/male



Front

Facing pages

Tree Stump (Kirikabu) 2003

A large, old tree gets cut down. Together with the forest animals, the tree stump figures out how to get along.

◆Episode

My four-year-old son did not have many playmates his age during the daycare's extended hours, so he spent that time with younger children. One day when I picked him up, he was reading to several of them. He was saying, "Hey, it's a butterfly! Flap flap, it lands on your nose!" and touching a child's nose, totally oblivious to me. Watching him, I realized that no matter the picture book, if a child has enjoyed being read to, the wish to read to someone else will naturally grow in his heart.

—Ms. Kobayashi, mother, first child/male

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

As we see above, when a parent has read picture books to a child, that practice will spread to siblings and friends. Eventually, it can be passed down through the generations. This is a truly important aspect of sharing picture books as part of our parenting culture.

As I mentioned in A) c, "Understanding due to having shared a picture book world," picture books nurture cooperation. One way they do this is through culture. Because a baby is born as a member of a family, the baby grows into personhood surrounded by that family and that region's culture.

Books, in turn, are repositories of a culture's wisdom, and of wishes to "leave at least this message behind." To read a picture book is to make such wishes a part of one's own life and to share them. In this way, picture books are veritable cultural treasures, left behind and passed down.

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E) Proof that we were alive together

When opening a picture book together, the baby and the reader feel one another's warmth, experience the same story world, and enjoy a sense of unity that is sometimes very deep. That sense of unity becomes proof that the two were alive together.

◆Episode

On his birthday, I always buy Shunta a book and write my thoughts to him in the white space. When he turned one, I gave him *Welcome to This World* (Mari Takabayashi; Nora Shoten). When he turned two, I gave him *Little Gorilla* (Ruth Bornstein, trans. Mimi Iwata; Horupu Shuppan). I know that as he grows older, his life will not always be pleasant; there will be difficulties, hardships, and times when he has to face challenges alone. Further on, I will probably die before he does. No one knows when that might happen, of course, but in the unlikely case that it happens soon, I want to leave proof with him in the form of these books, that we were alive together. At times when he truly feels lost or discouraged, even if I can't help him directly as a parent, I want him to be able to see the books and messages, recall the time we spent snuggling and enjoying books, and remember that he comes from somewhere. Deep down, he is not alone. I hope that this will help him to keep pushing forward. I believe that this is the most valuable gift I can give him.

—Ms. Mori, mother, first child/male



Front

Facing Pages

Welcome to This World (Watashi no akachan) 2004

Detailed illustrations portray things that a baby sees in the first year.

This picture book overflows with love for a new baby.



Front

***Little Gorilla* (Chibi Gorilla no chibi chibi) 1978**

From birth, Little Gorilla is loved by all sorts of animals, who play together with him. Illustrations humorously depict Little Gorilla growing up.

◆Episode

My father was not very involved in parenting me . . . so when trying to relate to my son, his grandson, he seemed at a loss, watching him from a distance.

One day, I got an idea. I handed Dad *Chug Chug Train* . . . I thought he might be upset, but he amiably took the book, put my son on his lap, and began to read aloud . . . He even ad-libbed, saying “let me on the train, please!” and “after you!” My son got engaged and asked him questions. “How come this is the last stop? Why does everybody get off?” “Well, that’s because there are no more spaces for passengers,” my father answered, in his way. I was surprised. I had read that book aloud many times, but I had never realized that the train was full! I assumed that my father would be proud of himself for reading it once and just stop there, but he continued to connect with my son very seriously. My son absolutely loved it. After that, reading with Grandpa became a ritual whenever we met. Around that same time, my father’s illness began to worsen. Now that I think about it, reading picture books aloud was a way he could spend time with his grandchild without burdening his body. It must have been a welcome method of communication for him. At picture book time, he would rouse himself from the sofa where he convalesced and enjoy reading. My son may not remember because he was small, but I got a clear sense of my father’s love for him. Even now, when I take the train book in my hand, I feel my father’s spirit and want to say a word of thanks to him.
—Ms. Takano, mother, first child/male

◆◆Commentary by Dr. Hiroko Sasaki

“I was loved, I was blessed.” Experiences that demonstrate this linger within our children. Then again, we’re not always grateful for happy times when we’re living them, so some memories can fade.

We now have lots of picture books that have been read by multiple generations. When parents have children of their own and rediscover books that their parents read to them,

they may reflect, “Ah, my parents read my book to me like this,” or, “That time they read to me was fun, I was really happy.” The memories can come flooding back, passing the parent’s parents’ blessings along.

Reading picture books together builds a kind of foundation for the future, but more than that, it helps us to spend our whole lives better, guiding and leading us toward appreciating our blessings.

We share picture books with babies; babies share them with siblings; children and teens share books with each other; lovers share books; parents and then grandparents share picture books with little ones, and the cycle renews.

Of course, grown-up literature and essays are tools for sharing reading, too, but superb picture books are short and plain, with a poem at their core that touches the heart. That poem-core can support many interpretations, and it offers us ample space in which to feel and think.

In happy times, and in times of heartbreak . . . at times in life when we need to stand still for a moment to rest, or need space to think . . . at all times, that poem is there for us.

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1.3 Conclusion

In Part I, we have considered “sharing books,” which Bookstart hopes will become part of all babies’ lives. We have examined what these moments accomplish for babies, caregivers, and parent-child relationships.

First, we saw that sharing books can enrich the bonding process before babies become verbal. The period before babies can share meaning is a challenging time of trying to communicate without words; parents and carers can feel very unsure about how to engage with babies. When we share picture books during this period, however, the carer can observe the baby’s subtle reactions, respond, and observe again, gradually bonding more deeply with the baby.

Later on, when the baby begins to show consistent reactions to picture book words and illustrations, the awe of “He got it!” “She understood!” awaits. Babies and readers who share picture book worlds can confirm understanding together because of such sharing, and enjoy insider secrets and play. Parents and carers clearly sense that mutual communication has become established.

Through “sharing books,” carers gain opportunities to observe closely how babies are taking in the world and growing. They can follow the child’s internal growth in imagination and individuality; empathize with the child; share many happen experiences; and enjoy an unexpected amazement.

We have also seen that for babies, “sharing books” becomes an early experience of sharing with someone, period. That in itself gives the baby pleasure; at the same time, it nurtures cooperation, essential to live in society.

Furthermore, picture books infuse daily parenting with many joys. When sharing picture books with babies, carers do not unilaterally read the words. Rather, opening books together gives rise to a back-and-forth, leading to rich play and variations. Fathers, who tend to have less time with children than mothers, can make the most of short times with baby via books, and even enjoy moments of sharing deep feelings. We have also seen that sharing picture books helps one to note the child’s growth and share parenting joys with one’s partner.

Picture books can support parents and carers themselves. This is because books provide a brief escape to another world; also, books help to comfort both carers and babies who are upset, naturally relaxing them. Picture book content and characters can help adult readers not only with relating to baby, but also with reflecting on one’s own life.

Children who have experienced the delight of reading picture books with others, may reenact this experience with siblings and friends when they grow a bit older. Much later, when these same children become parents, they may naturally wish to share picture books with their children. The practice of “sharing books” can ultimately be passed down through generations, serve as proof that people were alive together, and even help people to leave long-lasting messages on the hearts of their loved ones. The episodes and analysis above indicate an expansive range of possibilities.

Part II will examine whether Bookstart in Japan provides the impetus for parents and carers to share picture books with babies, with an analysis of a survey administered in local areas that offer Bookstart.

Part II

How Bookstart Provides the Impetus to Share Books with Babies

II.1 Introduction

In Part II, we will examine whether local Bookstart efforts provide a clear impetus for parents and carers to share picture books with babies at home, based on a survey carried out in seven municipalities in Japan. Through this examination, we point to the possibility that the rich harvest from “sharing books” explored in Part I is reaching more homes, due to Bookstart.

II.2 Survey Overview

■ Respondents

The survey was given in seven (7) local areas to caregivers eligible for Bookstart programming. To gather a meaningful number of responses within a set time frame, we narrowed our choices to cities with populations of 200,000 to 700,000 people; we considered how to include a variety of regions (to reduce regional bias) as well as a variety of baby ages at the time of Bookstart access. We then sought the cooperation of the selected municipalities.

Because well-baby checkups in these cities took place at 3-4 months, 6-7 months, and/or 9-11 months after babies’ birth, Bookstart tended to be offered at these points. The survey was given in three cities that offer Bookstart at 3-4 months (Window I), two cities that offer it at 6-7 months (Window II), and two cities that offer it at 9-11 months (Window III), totaling seven cities.

■ Method

Surveys were given to carers on the occasion of either their baby’s 1 year, 6-month checkup or their baby’s 1 year, 8-month checkup. The questions on the paper survey allowed for the free writing of comments. Surveys were distributed by post in advance of babies’ checkups in five cities, with instructions to bring the completed survey to the

checkup for collection. Surveys were distributed *at* the checkup and filled in during waiting times in two cities, and collected that day.

■ Time Frame

April–August 2011. Exact dates of administration within this frame varied by city.

■ Questions

- a. Child’s place in birth order
- b. Caregiver’s relationship to child
- c. Read-aloud conditions at home (whether doing read-aloud, how often, from what baby age, who reads aloud, why)
- d. Reflections on Bookstart (recollection of its purpose, impressions of the program, use of books received, whether program should continue)
- e. Free comments

Note: In some cases, the municipality added additional questions, but those questions are not addressed in this report.

■ Aggregation

All survey respondents included in our totals had had access to Bookstart on the occasion of a previous well-baby checkup, during the baby’s first year. Surveys left blank or containing unclear responses were not used. Rounding was used in calculating percentages, so that response percentages for each question did not necessarily add up to 100%.

■ Participating Municipalities

		City A	City B	City C	City D	City E	City F	City G	
Population		420,000	580,000	190,000	720,000	200,000	320,000	210,000	
Annual Birth		4,300	4,300	1,600	5,800	1,700	3,600	1,900	
Survey respondents		Caregivers who received a Bookstart pack at baby's 3-4 months checkup and attended baby's 1 year, 6-month checkup in City A, June-July 2011	Caregivers who received a Bookstart pack at baby's 3-4 months checkup and attended baby's 1 year, 6-month checkup in City A, April-May 2011	Caregivers who received a Bookstart pack at baby's 3 months checkup and attended baby's 1 year, 8-month checkup in City C, May, July and August 2011	Caregivers who received a Bookstart pack at baby's 6 months child-care consultation and attended baby's 1 year, 6-month checkup in City D, April-May 2011	Caregivers who received a Bookstart pack at baby's 6 months checkup and attended baby's 1 year, 6-month checkup in City E, June-July 2011	Caregivers who received a Bookstart pack at baby's 9-11 months checkup and attended baby's 1 year, 6-month checkup in City F, May-June 2011	Caregivers who received a Bookstart pack at baby's 10 months checkup and attended baby's 1 year, 6-month checkup in City G, May-July 2011	
	Baby Age at time of Bookstart	3-4 months	3-4 months	3-4 months	6-month	6-7 months	9-10 months	10-month	
	Baby Age at time of Survey	1 year, 6-7 months	1 year, 6-7 months	1 year, 8-9 months	1 year, 6-month	1 year, 6-7 months	1 year, 8-month (approx.)	1 year, 6-month	
Survey Method		Survey form distributed by hand at 1 year, 6-month checkup; filled in during waiting time; collected that day.	Survey form distributed by post along with medical history form before 1 year, 6-month checkup; collected at the checkup.	Survey form distributed by post along with medical history form before 20-month checkup; collected at the checkup.	Survey form distributed by post along with medical history form before 1 year, 6-month checkup; collected at the checkup.	Survey form distributed by post along with medical history form before 1 year, 6-month checkup; collected at the checkup.	Survey form distributed by post along with medical history form before 1 year, 6-month checkup; collected at the checkup.	Survey form distributed by hand at 1 year, 6-month checkup; filled in during waiting time; collected that day.	Total (Actual Number) or Average (Percentage)
Number of survey forms distributed (Number of checkup participants)		386	704	432	991	298	594	423	3828
Number of survey forms collected (Response rate)		363 94.0%	612 86.9%	322 74.5%	796 80.3%	267 89.6%	512 86.2%	373 88.2%	3245 85.7%
Number of valid responses		306	523	263	704	247	447	352	2842
Survey respondents' relationship to baby	Mother	96.0%	97.7%	99.2%	99.1%	98.8%	90.9%	97.4%	97.0%
	Father	4.0%	2.3%	0.8%	0.7%	0.4%	7.5%	2.3%	2.6%
	Grandmother	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.8%	1.4%	0.3%	0.4%
	Grandfather	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Relative	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Child's place in birth order	First child	56.5%	51.7%	46.0%	48.4%	45.3%	45.2%	53.4%	49.5%
	Second child	32.2%	34.3%	42.2%	39.3%	40.9%	32.9%	33.2%	36.4%
	Third child or later	11.3%	14.0%	11.8%	12.3%	13.8%	21.9%	13.4%	14.1%

Bookstart Japan, 2011

All seven municipalities that administered the survey offer Bookstart in the basic format of *providing a fun experience sharing a picture book with the baby, then gifting picture books to the baby's family*. The steering groups that implement Bookstart in the different cities differ somewhat in their make-up.⁴ As well, Bookstart tends to be offered at multiple sites in the larger municipalities. Given this context, there is naturally some variation in terms of who carries out Bookstart, the sort of space in which it is offered, and the content of the message conveyed. Carers who have accessed Bookstart in different cities will have somewhat different experiences.

Our survey of seven municipalities yielded responses from 3,245 parents and carers (among them, 2,842 had accessed Bookstart in the seven cities). The survey questions asked about the Bookstart experience itself, and then about picture book read-alouds in the home. The Bookstart experience could have influenced conditions in the home; therefore, variations in Bookstart programming in different areas could have influenced the survey results.

Our research focused not on local variations in Bookstart programming, however, but on common patterns that could be observed *despite* these variations. It was in common patterns that we sought out universal possibilities.

To optimize the conditions for respondents to provide qualitative data, we had surveys distributed in advance by post in as many cities as possible, and we made the free-comment space large to allow for plenty of writing.

II.3 Findings and Analysis (Excerpt)

A) Did Bookstart provide the impetus for parents to share books with babies?

① Connection between Baby's age at time of Bookstart contact and Baby's age when family began to read picture books aloud

In our survey, a comparatively high percentage of respondents said that the baby age at which they began read-alouds in the home was either the same age at which they had experienced Bookstart, or shortly thereafter. This was the case regardless of baby age at

the time of accessing Bookstart—whether during Window I (3-4 months), Window II (6-7 months), or Window III (9-11 months)—and it was the case in all cities except City F.

Figure 1 shows responses by city to the question “From about what month in the baby's life have you done read-aloud at home?” The top third of each city's row shows the percentage of respondents who chose each baby age range; the darker the color, the greater the proportion of respondents who chose that age range. The bottom third of each city's row has arrows showing when Bookstart was accessed, making it clear that respondents began read-alouds in the home either at the same time they experienced Bookstart or shortly thereafter. We can therefore surmise that Bookstart created the impetus to begin book sharing.

The middle third of each city's row shows the cumulative total of respondents who were sharing books with baby by each baby age. For cities in Window I, where Bookstart was accessed at the baby age of 3-4 months, it is clear that some 35 to 40 percent of respondents were book sharing by this age. This was not the case in cities where Bookstart was accessed later. For cities in Window II, more than 50 percent of respondents reported sharing books with baby by the age of 5-6 months, but for cities in Window III, the percentages of respondents sharing books with baby were still in the 30s and 40s for this age. The disparity continued through the baby age of 7-8 months, by which time 70 percent of respondents in Windows I and II were book sharing but as few as 40 to 60 percent of respondents in Window III were. The baby age at which totals for all cities drew even was 11-12 months, right after Bookstart was offered in the cities in Window III.

⁴ Depending on the municipality, local related institutions (library, public health center, child-rearing support division), local volunteers, and/or others make up the steering groups.

Figure 1. From about what month in the baby's life have you done read-aloud at home?

				1-2 months	3-4 months	5-6 months	7-8 months	9-10 months	11-12 months	After 12 months	Total
Window I	City A	(n=284)	Percentage	10.9%	29.9%	17.3%	13.7%	9.5%	9.9%	8.8%	100.0%
			Cumulative total	10.9%	40.8%	58.1%	71.8%	81.3%	91.2%	100.0%	—
		Baby age at time of Bookstart				↔					
	City B	(n=501)	Percentage	11.2%	30.1%	20.6%	9.6%	12.2%	11.2%	5.2%	100.0%
			Cumulative total	11.2%	41.3%	61.9%	71.5%	83.6%	94.8%	100.0%	—
		Baby age at time of Bookstart				↔					
	City C	(n=249)	Percentage	8.8%	26.1%	21.3%	14.1%	12.0%	12.0%	5.6%	100.0%
			Cumulative total	8.8%	34.9%	56.2%	70.3%	82.3%	94.4%	100.0%	—
		Baby age at time of Bookstart				↔					
Window II	City D	(n=680)	Percentage	9.0%	16.6%	26.5%	20.0%	12.8%	11.0%	4.1%	100.0%
			Cumulative total	9.0%	25.6%	52.1%	72.1%	84.9%	95.9%	100.0%	—
		Baby age at time of Bookstart					↔				
	City E	(n=242)	Percentage	8.7%	14.5%	27.7%	21.9%	10.7%	10.3%	6.2%	100.0%
			Cumulative total	8.7%	23.1%	50.8%	72.7%	83.5%	93.8%	100.0%	—
Baby age at time of Bookstart					↔						
Window III	City F	(n=433)	Percentage	9.7%	15.2%	21.2%	14.3%	20.1%	13.9%	5.5%	100.0%
			Cumulative total	9.7%	24.9%	46.2%	60.5%	80.6%	94.5%	100.0%	—
		Baby age at time of Bookstart						↔			
	City G	(n=344)	Percentage	5.2%	12.2%	16.0%	9.9%	28.8%	21.5%	6.4%	100.0%
			Cumulative total	5.2%	17.4%	33.4%	43.3%	72.1%	93.6%	100.0%	—
Baby age at time of Bookstart							↔				

Bookstart Japan, 2011

Shading (Figure 1 and 2)

	25% or above
	Between 20% and 25%
	Between 15% and 20%

Figure 2. From about what month in the baby's life have you done read-aloud at home? (Organized by baby's place in birth order.)

			Baby's place in birth order		1-2 months	3-4 months	5-6 months	7-8 months	9-10 months	11-12 months	After 12 month	Total
Window I	City A	First child (n=165)	Percentage	10.9%	31.5%	18.2%	15.8%	8.5%	7.9%	7.3%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	10.9%	42.4%	60.6%	76.4%	84.8%	92.7%	100.0%	—	
		Second child or later (n=118)	Percentage	10.2%	28.0%	16.1%	11.0%	11.0%	12.7%	11.0%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	10.2%	38.1%	54.2%	65.3%	76.3%	89.0%	100.0%	—	
		Baby's age at time of Bookstart			↔							
	City B	First child (n=261)	Percentage	10.7%	33.7%	23.0%	8.0%	11.5%	10.3%	2.7%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	10.7%	44.4%	67.4%	75.5%	87.0%	97.3%	100.0%	—	
		Second child or later (n=239)	Percentage	11.7%	26.4%	18.0%	11.3%	13.0%	11.7%	7.9%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	11.7%	38.1%	56.1%	67.4%	80.3%	92.1%	100.0%	—	
		Baby's age at time of Bookstart			↔							
	City C	First child (n=116)	Percentage	6.0%	35.3%	22.4%	8.6%	9.5%	11.2%	6.9%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	6.0%	41.4%	63.8%	72.4%	81.9%	93.1%	100.0%	—	
		Second child or later (n=133)	Percentage	11.3%	18.0%	20.3%	18.8%	14.3%	12.8%	4.5%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	11.3%	29.3%	49.6%	68.4%	82.7%	95.5%	100.0%	—	
Baby's age at time of Bookstart			↔									
Window II	City D	First child (n=328)	Percentage	8.2%	17.4%	29.9%	22.0%	11.0%	9.1%	2.4%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	8.2%	25.6%	55.5%	77.4%	88.4%	97.6%	100.0%	—	
		Second child or later (n=350)	Percentage	9.7%	16.0%	23.1%	18.3%	14.6%	12.6%	5.7%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	9.7%	25.7%	48.9%	67.1%	81.7%	94.3%	100.0%	—	
		Baby's age at time of Bookstart				↔						
	City E	First child (n=110)	Percentage	8.2%	20.0%	22.7%	21.8%	10.0%	10.9%	6.4%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	8.2%	28.2%	50.9%	72.7%	82.7%	93.6%	100.0%	—	
		Second child or later (n=132)	Percentage	9.1%	9.8%	31.8%	22.0%	11.4%	9.8%	6.1%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	9.1%	18.9%	50.8%	72.7%	84.1%	93.9%	100.0%	—	
		Baby's age at time of Bookstart				↔						
Window III	City F	First child (n=198)	Percentage	8.1%	18.2%	23.7%	17.7%	18.7%	8.6%	5.1%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	8.1%	26.3%	50.0%	67.7%	86.4%	94.9%	100.0%	—	
		Second child or later (n=235)	Percentage	11.1%	12.8%	19.1%	11.5%	21.3%	18.3%	6.0%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	11.1%	23.8%	43.0%	54.5%	75.7%	94.0%	100.0%	—	
		Baby's age at time of Bookstart					↔					
	City G	First child (n=183)	Percentage	6.0%	12.0%	15.3%	12.6%	30.1%	19.7%	4.4%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	6.0%	18.0%	33.3%	45.9%	76.0%	95.6%	100.0%	—	
		Second child or later (n=161)	Percentage	4.3%	12.4%	16.8%	6.8%	27.3%	23.6%	8.7%	100.0%	
			Cumulative total	4.3%	16.8%	33.5%	40.4%	67.7%	91.3%	100.0%	—	
Baby's age at time of Bookstart						↔						

Bookstart Japan, 2011

This connection between Bookstart and families beginning to share books was observed regardless of the baby's place in the sibling birth order, as shown in Figure 2. It seems that even parents who had had children before the baby eligible for Bookstart, experienced Bookstart as an impetus to begin sharing books with the baby, as shown in Figure 2.

◆ Survey Respondents' Comments

At Bookstart, I saw for the first time that *wow, my baby really loves picture books!* It got me to start reading aloud, so I'm glad.

—City B

I didn't expect my baby to respond to a picture book at the 3-4 month checkup. I was floored at how happy my baby seemed!

—City B

We experienced picture books for the first time at Bookstart. I was amazed by, and happy to know, how much my baby liked them!

—City D

At the checkup I saw that even at 6 months, my child would follow picture books. Learning this made playing together more fun.

—City D

I still remember how happily my daughter responded. Bookstart was a great event for us, very memorable.

—City D

When the Bookstart volunteer read aloud, my child responded so happily that I thought, for the first time, *Who knew a book could bring out all these smiles?* I had tried reading before but had not gotten much response, so I had stopped. The books we received really seemed to suit my child's fancy, so we used them a lot.

—City D

I had been wanting to read aloud since before Bookstart, but with so many picture book options available, I didn't know where to begin. I even went to bookshops and left without buying a book! I had also thought that my baby might not be ready (would be unable to calm for a book, likely to tear it, etc.) so kept putting it off. But then, at Bookstart, I saw my baby happily pick a book from among 4-5 choices, and I saw the

volunteer read it aloud just any old way (in the best sense—not word for word), and I realized I didn't have to think so hard. I relaxed, and we began doing read-aloud!

—City F

.

Again and again across Windows I, II, and III, a connection between baby age when read-aloud began in the home, and when Bookstart was accessed, was observed. In addition, regardless of baby age at the time of Bookstart, by the baby age of 12 months, about 90% of households were sharing picture books with baby.

The impetus to read aloud probably did not work the exact same way in each of the three Bookstart access Windows. Information about picture book read-alouds with baby has possibly been reaching more caregivers recently via the Internet and parenting magazines, and some local communities actively create an environment in which children spend time with books beginning in babyhood. Also, as shown in Part I, babies tend to respond more visibly to books as baby age increases.

Where Bookstart was offered in Window I (3-4 months), respondents' free comments suggest that the impetus to offer read-aloud at home came from surprise that a small baby would respond at all. Also, parents in Window I were early in their child-rearing journeys and seemed to find the gifted books themselves to be novel. We therefore surmise that the impetus here was almost "physical" in nature.

On the other hand, when Bookstart took place during Window III (9-11 months), this became an opportunity to learn about read-aloud while parenting an older baby, and to observe the baby's very clear responses to a book. We surmise that the impetus here may have been more "psychological" in nature.

② Continued use of books received through Bookstart

With regard to the books gifted through Bookstart, carers who selected "I agree" or "I somewhat agree" for the statement "I was happy to receive the picture books" comprised an average of 98.7% of respondents in the 7 cities. Virtually all respondents saw the gift of picture books in a positive light.

Figure 3. (How did you feel about Bookstart?) I was happy to receive the picture books.

			Total	I agree.	I somewhat agree.
Window I	City A 3-4 months	(n=298)	98.7%	82.6%	16.1%
	City B 3-4 months	(n=498)	97.4%	79.3%	18.1%
	City C 3-4 months	(n=240)	98.3%	74.2%	24.2%
Window II	City D 6-month	(n=672)	99.1%	88.1%	11.0%
	City E 6-7 months	(n=238)	98.3%	85.3%	13.0%
Window III	City F 9-11 months	(n=405)	99.8%	91.4%	8.4%
	City G 10-month	(n=310)	99.4%	84.5%	14.8%
Average			98.7%	83.6%	15.1%

Bookstart Japan, 2011

With regard to use of the gifted books, respondents who selected “I am (or was) using them quite a lot” or “I am (or was) using them” comprised more than 80% in every Window.

Figure 4. Are you (or were you) using the books received at Bookstart?

			Total	I am (or was) using them quite a lot.	I am (or was) using them.
Window I	City A 3-4 months	(n=297)	85.5%	37.7%	47.8%
	City B 3-4 months	(n=504)	88.5%	45.2%	43.3%
	City C 3-4 months	(n=257)	83.3%	34.6%	48.6%
Window II	City D 6-month	(n=683)	92.1%	42.0%	50.1%
	City E 6-7 months	(n=239)	92.1%	43.9%	48.1%
Window III	City F 9-11 months	(n=419)	92.6%	41.5%	51.1%
	City G 10-month	(n=312)	90.7%	44.2%	46.5%
Average			89.2%	41.3%	47.9%

Bookstart Japan, 2011

In the free comments, a number of respondents expressed that the gift of books itself had led them to read picture books.

◆ Survey Respondents’ Comments

Before Bookstart, we did not really own any picture books, so it gave us a way to try them out. It also served as a reference about what kinds of books and content are good.

—City E

With my first child especially, Bookstart provided a good nudge to start reading aloud. I had not expected to read picture books when the baby was so small. It was hard to know what books to choose, so the book gift made me happy.

—City E

I didn’t own any books yet at the time I received the gift, so it provided a good nudge.

—City G

I think a lot of people don’t know exactly when to start read-aloud or what sorts of books to use at first (I know I barely had time to think of such things!). Bookstart is a great service.

—City D

.

The survey indicated that most parents and carers appreciated the bookgifting. Indeed, their positive responses to Bookstart may have stemmed as much from the free books as from the experience. “We got a present!” is an unusual, happy thing to feel and may have boosted motivation to open a picture book right away at home. This may well have been a factor in the use of Bookstart books that the respondents reported.

B) How did the experience of Bookstart affect caregivers’ perception of “sharing books,” or time spent reading picture books with baby?

The percentage of survey respondents who chose “I agree” or “I somewhat agree” for statements that Bookstart “was enjoyable,” “provided time to relax,” “provided a good opportunity to watch my child be read to,” “helped me see my baby’s interest in picture books,” and/or “is likely to help our parent-child communication” topped 80 percent for all baby ages.

Figure 5. How did you feel after you experienced Bookstart?

			1. I enjoyed it.				2. It gave me a chance to relax		
			Total	I agree.	I somewhat agree.		Total	I agree.	I somewhat agree.
Window I	City A 3-4 months	(n=295)	92.9%	49.8%	43.1%	(n=292)	86.6%	35.6%	51.0%
	City B 3-4 months	(n=498)	94.0%	41.4%	52.6%	(n=498)	83.7%	30.5%	53.2%
	City C 3-4 months	(n=236)	89.0%	41.5%	47.5%	(n=235)	81.3%	33.6%	47.7%
Window II	City D 6-month	(n=669)	95.4%	53.2%	42.2%	(n=666)	86.6%	36.8%	49.8%
	City E 6-7 months	(n=238)	94.5%	56.7%	37.8%	(n=239)	89.1%	40.6%	48.5%
Window III	City F 9-11 months	(n=402)	98.8%	62.7%	36.1%	(n=402)	93.3%	44.0%	49.3%
	City G 10-month	(n=309)	97.7%	57.0%	40.8%	(n=309)	89.6%	39.5%	50.2%
Average			94.6%	51.8%	42.8%		87.2%	37.2%	50.0%

Bookstart Japan, 2011

			3. I enjoyed watching my child during the read-aloud.				4. I understood that babies can show interest in picture books.		
			Total	I agree.	I somewhat agree.		Total	I agree.	I somewhat agree.
Window I	City A 3-4 months	(n=295)	94.6%	58.6%	35.9%	(n=295)	89.8%	56.3%	33.6%
	City B 3-4 months	(n=497)	91.8%	49.7%	42.1%	(n=495)	90.9%	54.4%	36.5%
	City C 3-4 months	(n=234)	90.6%	50.9%	39.7%	(n=234)	88.5%	50.0%	38.5%
Window II	City D 6-month	(n=669)	94.5%	63.4%	31.1%	(n=670)	93.9%	63.9%	30.0%
	City E 6-7 months	(n=239)	95.4%	65.3%	30.1%	(n=239)	93.3%	59.4%	33.9%
Window III	City F 9-11 months	(n=400)	96.0%	65.3%	30.8%	(n=405)	95.1%	71.6%	23.5%
	City G 10-month	(n=309)	97.7%	65.0%	32.7%	(n=310)	95.2%	65.2%	30.0%
Average			94.4%	59.7%	34.6%		92.4%	60.1%	32.3%

Bookstart Japan, 2011

			5. It seemed useful for communication with my child.		
			Total	I agree.	I somewhat agree.
Window I	City A 3-4 months	(n=298)	97.0%	66.4%	30.5%
	City B 3-4 months	(n=500)	98.2%	68.0%	30.2%
	City C 3-4 months	(n=235)	95.7%	61.7%	34.0%
Window II	City D 6-month	(n=668)	97.9%	76.6%	21.3%
	City E 6-7 months	(n=239)	98.7%	67.8%	31.0%
Window III	City F 9-11 months	(n=405)	98.8%	80.2%	18.5%
	City G 10-month	(n=309)	98.4%	73.8%	24.6%
Average			97.8%	70.7%	27.2%

Bookstart Japan, 2011

Comments on the survey show that Bookstart helped carers to see that babies enjoyed books, which led to trying out more books.

◆ Survey respondents' comments

My child still loves *Gush, Gush, Rip, Rip* and gets super excited when I read it. Our picture book journey started here, so I'm very grateful.

—City B

My child loves picture books, and several times a day will bring one over and want me to read. Without the Bookstart gift, I might not have gotten started reading more books. I am glad to have received the gift.

—City B

While reading the Bookstart books again and again, my child's responses have improved and we're having a really good time. With the gift books as our starting point, we've also begun to read other picture books.

—City B

Since receiving the book gift, I've been thinking about what books would make my child happy and picking out different ones at the bookstore and library to show my child. Based on the reaction, I'll sometimes buy.

—City E

.

In this way, many parents and carers have reported positive experiences of sharing books through Bookstart, and have seen that such moments are enjoyable or relaxing, and can help in parent-child communication. Various media can facilitate communication in childcare, but it can be said that Bookstart effectively conveys the usefulness of picture books as tools to parents and carers, further widening their use.

II.4 Conclusion

In Part II, we have deduced from our survey that Bookstart serves as impetus for many households to begin “sharing books.”

In the local areas implementing Bookstart, a high percentage of respondents reported that the baby age at which families began reading aloud was either the same as baby age at the time of Bookstart access, or very slightly older. This trend was observed regardless of baby age at the time of Bookstart access, and across different local areas. Responses also showed that books gifted by Bookstart were (or had been) used at home.

Furthermore, through the Bookstart experience, many caregivers came to perceive “sharing books” positively as fun, relaxing, and useful to parent-child communication. Bookstart became the impetus for carers to take interest in other picture books, and for more households to use books as communication tools with babies.

Part I made clear that sharing books brings rich rewards for babies, caregivers, and the parent-child relationship. Part II shows that for most households that accessed Bookstart, the activity provided an impetus to share books in the home. From this, we can conclude that due to Bookstart, more households are experiencing the rich rewards of sharing books.

Part III

How Bookstart Affects Local Governments, Organizations, and Related Individuals

III.1 Findings and Analysis (Summary)

In Part III of the Research Report, we analyzed the effects of Bookstart on local governments, organizations and related individuals as regards three topics: child-rearing environment, parent-child health initiatives, and the people involved in running Bookstart. We learned that as a program implemented by local entities, Bookstart can bring positive effects not only for the babies and caregivers who access it, but also for the people involved in offering it.

With regard to the local child-rearing environment, we noted the importance of Bookstart's structure. Bookstart is not undertaken exclusively by local governing authorities, public institutions/organizations, or volunteers. Rather, it happens through cooperation among government and private entities that have various specialties and emphases. Indeed, Bookstart brings a community together. Because of this structure, Bookstart has added to regions' child-rearing environments in ways that go beyond Bookstart programming itself.

Of particular notice was the way in which Bookstart helped different entities mutually confirm that “we want to build a community where carers can relax and raise children, and where babies can grow up happy.” Bookstart has as its center the smiles of babies, and each time Bookstart is carried out in tandem with well-baby checkups, the people implementing it have a chance to reconfirm the above wishes. Thus, the Bookstart structure itself supports a better child-rearing environment.

Bookstart also encourages making regional buildings and facilities child-friendly, and the strengthening of parent-support initiatives. In addition, Bookstart provides avenues for residents to identify with being “a good region to raise children,” as symbolized by actively implementing Bookstart.

Next, regarding what Bookstart accomplishes for parent-child public health initiatives, it grew clear that Bookstart has helped solve some of the problems previously inherent in these endeavors. Bookstart uses moments like checkup waiting times for activities

and read-alouds, thereby making the atmosphere at checkup sites significantly more enjoyable and peaceful.

It also grew clear that, because Bookstart involves gifting book bags to parents one-on-one or in small groups, the activity is in-effect tailored to individual participants, enriching the parent-child health visit overall.

Finally, as regards the people who implement Bookstart, library staff in particular report that it gives them an opportunity to re-confirm the purpose of their vocation, re-examine the role they play in their community, and learn more about what sharing books does for babies.

For local volunteers, the rare opportunity to meet babies and young parents in the area brought joy and a sense of meaning to their lives. They also found joy in contributing to cooperative efforts, and in finding a role and a place to serve within the community.

In Closing

We at Bookstart have made it our aim to bring book sharing to all babies.

Through the Research Report, we learned that moments of sharing books are both unique and diverse, varying with the combination of people involved, the developmental stage of the baby, the picture book chosen, and the conditions in which it is read. Different families can find their own different kinds of delight in these moments, and they can create wonderful memories that enrich the lives of both children and adults.

Our commentator in Part I, Dr. Hiroko Sasaki, writes:

“Bookstart can never determine everything about a baby’s future or address all of a baby’s needs. Both the picture book sharing and the home environment that offers it are finite in terms of time. They can lead to a blessed phase of life, which then becomes the base on which future growth unfolds.”

As children do their growing, parents and carers consider how to support children’s choices, and both children and adults think again and again about family relationships. In the midst of this, moments sharing books in babyhood can be looked back upon as examples of what happiness looks like. This is yet another way in which such moments can prove meaningful.

We can also say something similar about the regions that implement Bookstart. It is impossible, of course, for a region to become “a great place to raise children” merely by offering Bookstart. Regions that implement Bookstart can, however, use it as a jumping-off point to think about the happiness of babies and children, and about what sort of environment the region wishes to create. This can then lead to different regional efforts, and is surely another way in which Bookstart proves valuable.

In closing, we would like to offer our deepest thanks to the parents and carers who recorded and submitted descriptions of sharing books with children. We would like to thank the parents and carers who responded to the Bookstart Japan survey in their cities, as well as those in every city who distributed and collected the survey. Finally, we would like to offer our sincere gratitude to all who implement Bookstart in Japan and who shared their thoughts and feelings with us, regarding Bookstart’s content and activities.

If our Research Report and this English edition can be of use to people eager to run baby bookgifting programs around the world—and people now running such programs—and contribute in multi-faceted ways to their vision, that would be our greatest pleasure.

In the course of implementing Bookstart, we have sensed that what “sharing books” offers is not only for Japanese children. It is critical for living happily in all places and in all times.

If Bookstart can be offered in more and more countries and regions, so that someday, more books are shared with more babies born on Earth . . . that is our wish.

Appendices

1) About Japan (Figures as of 2020)

Population: 125,000,000

Annual births: 840,000

Total fertility rate: 1.34%

Aging population (share of the population ages 65 and over): 28.7%

Expatriate population: 2,880,000 (2% of population)

Administrative divisions: 47 prefectures containing 1,741 municipalities

Features of regional administration:

- Two levels of local government: prefectural and municipal (city, ward, town or village). Directly elected legislatures function at both levels, as does a directly elected governor or mayor.
- Local governments are the level at which parent-child health and public library services are offered. Public health centers and public libraries in particular are operated by local municipalities.
- Japan has 3,316 public libraries.
- Municipal health centers' services are primarily provided by public health nurses. Services are for all ages with special emphasis on infants and the elderly.
- By law, municipalities must offer well-baby/well-child checkups at 18 months to 2 years of age, and again between 3 and 4 years of age. In addition, checkups are offered at 3 months, 6 months, 9 months, or other junctures as decided by the municipality. Group checkups or individual checkups (done at medical facilities) are available.
- At checkups, doctors and public health nurses examine babies' growth and development, judge whether support is needed, and arrange follow-up as necessary.
- For appropriate timing and in order to take advantage of high participation rates (more than 95%), Bookstart tends to be offered at a group checkup during baby's first year.

⁵ Bunko private libraries have been established in various places: private homes, community centers, temples, or anywhere many books (1,000-3,000 volumes) can be stored. Children may freely gather, play, read and borrow books on open days. Bunko libraries may be run by a volunteer or group of volunteers. They first became

- In addition to well-baby/-child checkups, public health centers may offer prenatal classes, newborn home visits, weaning seminars, dental exams and/or other services as determined by the municipality.

2) About Bookstart in Japan

❖ History

- 1999: Observations in the UK. Visits to BookTrust, local libraries, public health centers, children's hospitals, financial backers.
- 2000: National Year of Reading for Children (NYRC) in Japan. NYRC Board (private sector) commissions Bookstart pilot study involving 200 households in Suginami Ward, Tokyo.
- 2001: Bookstart begins to spread nationwide. Bookstart Japan is founded.
- 2002: Bookstart Japan is registered as a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Bookstart.

❖ Current scale

- Approximately 460,000 babies were eligible for services in 2020
- Approximately 7,800,000 babies have been eligible since services began.

❖ Overall structure

- Principal decisions are taken by municipalities. Costs for implementation are incorporated in public library or health center budgets in most municipalities.
- Activities are carried out in partnership with local libraries, health centers, and child-rearing divisions, together with local volunteers. The entity overseeing Bookstart varies by municipality, as do participating groups and individuals.
- Local volunteers may be recruited from groups already offering read-alouds at libraries, community centers or elementary schools; from bunko private children's libraries⁵; or from among former daycare teachers. Most municipalities offer trainings for local volunteers.
- The point of contact is usually a well-baby group health checkup offered to all babies in the municipality in their first year of life. Baby age at the time of implementation varies by municipality.

popular in the 1950s, and in 1980, there were more than 4,400 such libraries around Japan. In 2008, there were 1,143.

- Volunteers typically offer a fun experience sharing a picture book with an individual baby and parent, or to a small group of babies with parents, who are then presented with their own picture book pack. Value is placed on quality delivery of both the experience and the gift.

❖ Operations

- As an NPO, we pursue the ideals of Bookstart begun in the UK, promoting Bookstart program in Japan. We have been established as an independent, neutral, nonprofit civic organization.
- Using information that we gather about the implementation of Bookstart throughout Japan, we offer materials and training workshops, as well as Bookstart packs.
- We operate on the income from selling Bookstart packs and from membership dues paid by supporting companies.
- Trustees who specialize in children's reading promotion, pediatrics, developmental psychology, childcare, library service, community building take part in our planning, while full-time staff carry out the daily operations.

❖ Bookstart pack

【The Bookstart pack inclusion】

- Picture books for babies (several titles which differ by municipality)
- Advice booklet (a pamphlet about the joy of sharing books with baby, itself designed to look like a picture book)
- List of recommended books (prepared by the municipality)
- Library registration application (prepared by the municipality)
- Useful child-rearing materials (prepared by the municipality)
- Cotton bag (one of two types) or paper bag to hold all items above (bag type selected by municipality)



【Book acquisition and distribution】

- Bookstart Japan holds an independent, impartial book selection meeting at which a list of 30 Bookstart Books is compiled, drawing from picture books published for babies in Japan.
- Municipalities select books from this list to include in packs.
- Picture books chosen as Bookstart Books are provided by publishers neither for profit nor at a loss, directly to Bookstart Japan. Bookstart Japan then vends books to municipalities at low cost in a “non-commercial model.”
- In this “non-commercial model,” when Bookstart Japan vends book packs to municipalities, it takes in just enough income to function with financial independence, and to offer printed materials, trainings, and other services in support of Bookstart in various regions.

【Multilingual offerings】

- Bookstart Japan is preparing a Content Introduction Sheet in nine (9) languages for each of the titles on the Bookstart Books list. These sheets provide a simple description of each book's contents as well as the pronunciation of its Japanese text, expressed in letters of the Roman alphabet. We also encourage telling the stories in readers' mother tongues.
- The Bookstart advice booklet is also being prepared in nine (9) languages, in bilingual format with Japanese and the language side-by-side.

【Offerings for the visually impaired】

- Municipalities can exchange picture books purchased from Bookstart Japan for personally translated Braille books⁶ to gift to visually impaired parents or children.
- Some titles on the Bookstart Books list have been published in touch-and-feel versions available commercially, which municipalities can purchase through Bookstart Japan.
- Braille and large-print editions of the Bookstart advice booklet, including its main text and descriptions of its illustrations, are available.
- Braille and large-print versions of text introducing Bookstart and books for visually impaired are available.

⁶ The Braille versions of books available by exchange through Bookstart Japan are editions in which the text of commercially available picture books has been transferred as Braille to transparent vinyl sheets, which are then glued to the type portion of the original book. The shape of illustrations is also expressed in the vinyl sheet and

glued on, and/or an explanation sheet is included, so that people with and without visual impairments can enjoy a book together. Bookstart Japan sources these versions from an NPO with many years' experience in creating them: Tenyaku Ehon Fureai Bunko.

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