



# Playing the Book: A Way for Children to Build a Bridge to Literacy

by PAT BARRETT DRAGAN

*Picture books and the arts—visual arts, drama, music, and dance—are magical tools to help children imagine, play, and wonder. They support each child’s journey to literacy, as well as enable acquisition of social and emotional skills and other knowledge.*



## LITERACY CHAMPION: PAT BARRETT DRAGAN

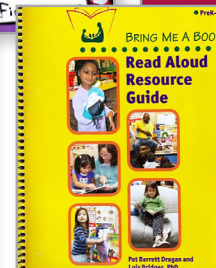
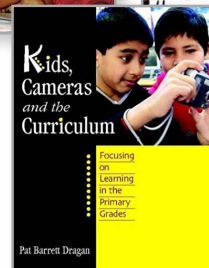
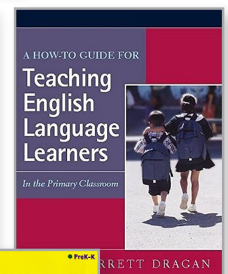
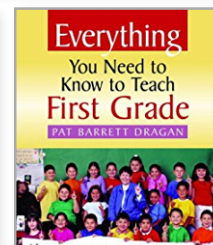
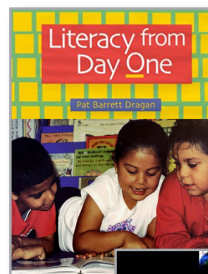
Pat is a career educator, from Grade K–University. She has taught first grade, credential classes in literacy at California State University, San Francisco, and children’s literature and art workshops at the University of CA, Santa Cruz Extension. She has written

and illustrated five trade books for children, including *The Kid’s Cookbook: Yum! I Eat It!* — with Rosemary Dalton. She has also written four professional development books for teachers, published by Heinemann:

- *Literacy from Day One*
- *Everything You Need to Know to Teach First Grade*
- *The How-to Guide for Teaching English Language Learners in the Primary Classroom*
- *Kids, Cameras, and the Curriculum*

Pat partnered with Lois Bridges, Executive Director of The Bring Me a Book Foundation, to co-author *The Bring Me a Book Read Aloud Guide* (Bring Me A Book, 2010).

Pat now mentors new teachers through the California State New-Teacher Induction Program.



## One to Know: The Powerful Connection Between Images and Words

Children are alchemists: they can easily transform books that they love into playful and powerful images and experiences, and wander through the pages again and again. When children make the connection between images and words, they gain new skills to embed language with meaning, strengthening their acquisition of literacy.

### What to Do

- Give children choices and control over their imaginative play.
- Set up “Play the Book” stations or centers, and set out a variety of favorite books; some art materials the children already know how to use; possibly some realia, such as hats, scarves, and so on, that are appropriate for role playing some of the books.
- After an activity or work time and clean up, allow time for sharing, conversation, and meaningful wrap-up of the experience.
- Collect lists of children’s books that lead into imaginative activities. You can see what inspires your group. Some examples are:
  - \* *Roxaboxen*, by Alice McLerran. Children create an imaginary community in the desert (or corner of the classroom) and play all kinds of invented games there.
  - \* *Sheep Out to Eat*, by Nancy Van Laan. Children may wish to make menus, paper or clay food, and enact a restaurant scene. Aprons would be a good piece of realia to add, as well as samples of restaurant menus, and so on.
  - \* Link play opportunities to many curriculum areas, including: books about rocks, and tubs of rocks for creating structures or drawing on with oil pastels; bug books and plastic insects, and so on.
  - \* Keep in mind that play is a way for children to “try on” life. As Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.”



### More to Know and Do

Once children understand the play-with-the-book concept, they can think of all kinds of ways to do it. Literature leads the way!

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