

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

Your selected stories, with their notes and sources.

The Harbour One

Ines, this one reached you through what is on, and who it suits. Here is a story about Amir, whose lunch break has a cartoon running in it.

Amir drives people around the city in his own car, and the rides come to him through an app on his phone. In the middle of the day there are few rides. Then Amir drives home to Northside and eats his lunch standing up at the counter. The app stays open beside his plate, in case the airport wakes up. Hallida is in the front room, fitting a dress on a customer. Julia, who is four, has the television. It is showing whatever Idris left it on before school.

That is how the choosing is done in this house, and it has always seemed fair enough. Idris is eight and knows the remote. Amir knows the river, the one-way streets and which hotels give good tips. What is on at lunchtime has never been his department.

Today it is something with a great deal of shouting in it. The pictures change faster than Amir can chew. Julia is on the rug with a cracker.

He watches for a while with his fork in the air. He tries to work out who the blue one is angry with, and he cannot. He is forty years old and he cannot follow a cartoon. This strikes him as funny more than anything.

He puts the plate down, takes the remote and goes looking. It takes longer than he expects. The television has a whole row of programmes made for small children, and he has never opened it. Near the end of the row he finds a harbour. There are tugboats with faces. Tugboats are the small strong boats that push the big ships. There is a crane that talks slowly, and water that looks like water. One of the tugs is late for a ferry. Nothing else happens for some time. It reminds him of the old ferry pier at dawn, the two gulls included.

He presses it. The shouting stops and the harbour begins.

Julia goes on sitting on the rug with the cracker.

"Tug," Amir says, to nobody in particular. "The small ones are tugs."

He finishes his lunch standing up. The app wakes. It is the airport after all. There is a pen on the fridge, where Hallida writes the hour he says he will be back. On his way out Amir takes the pen. Under today's hour he writes THE HARBOUR ONE. Now whoever holds the remote tomorrow will know what he meant. Idris will have views about this. Idris may well win.

 NOTES

A note from us. What a small child watches can arrive without anyone choosing it: through an older brother, or because it came on next. One way is to look, once, for something slow made for children this small, and write its name where the house can see it; what repeats each week is putting it on, not the looking. It costs a lunch break spent in a menu.

Where this comes from: reviews that pooled many studies of young children and screens. In two, programmes made for learning went with slightly better language or vocabulary. The largest found no link between content made for children and how children think or get on with others. There, content that was violent, full of action or made for adults went with slightly lower ratings of children's behaviour and feelings. The links were small. Choosing a programme the way this story shows was not tested. Madigan and colleagues, 2020; Mallawaarachchi and colleagues, 2024; Jing and colleagues, 2023.

Reviews mostly of families as they live, and they do not all agree: the cause is not shown.

This is about what is on, not about how long, and it is not a promise about your child's words.

Not for everyone: not for the day when an older child's programme is the only one the house can agree on. Whatever keeps a small child safe and busy while you earn or cook is its own good reason.

 NOTES

On Top of the Fridge

Ines, this one reached you through whose devices, and where they live. Here is a story about Theo, whose phone is the only screen in the apartment.

Theo's cousin Jade works nights at Riverside Hospital. She comes by straight from her shift. She brings him a newspaper from the stand under the green awning on Ferry Street. She also brings a carrier bag, and she puts it on the table as if it might go off.

Her old tablet is in the bag. She has wiped everything off it and found a pink rubber case for it somewhere. "For Nell," she says. "Her own. Then you get your phone back."

It is a fair point. Two people live in the apartment, Theo and Nell, and there is one phone. The phone is how the warehouse reaches Theo when somebody cannot work a shift. Twice this month it has rung in the back seat of the car, in Nell's hands, in the middle of the bus song. He has taken a call from his manager while the wheels on the bus were still going round. A second screen would be a gift to his working life. Jade runs her life on lists, and she has clearly thought about it.

He turns the tablet over. It weighs nothing. Nell is three. She is on the floor with two saucepan lids, and she has not looked up.

What stops him is a small word. When the song is over, his phone goes back into his pocket, because it is his. There has never been a discussion about that. A tablet that is hers has no pocket to go back to. It would live where her things live: in the bag, in the bed, on the floor of the car. He does not know whether that matters. He has no idea how a person would find out.

"Think about it," says Jade. "It's not a kidney."

"I'm thinking," says Theo.

He puts the tablet on top of the fridge. That is where things go in Theo's apartment while he thinks. A parking ticket is up there, and the form for the childminder, and a drill that belongs to somebody at work. Jade drinks her coffee and goes home to sleep.

A week later the tablet is still up there, fully charged, in its pink case, beside the drill. The phone still rides in the back seat. On Thursday the warehouse rang in the middle of the bus song. Nell has moved on from the saucepan lids to the saucepan.

A note from us. No practice has been tested here, so this note offers none. The story shows one ordinary reason to give a small child a device of her own, and one ordinary reason to wait. It leaves both standing.

 NOTES

Where this comes from: a study that recorded how long three- to five-year-olds spent on phones and tablets, including children who had a device of their own, and a small study that tried out a questionnaire for parents about screens at home. The questionnaire gives one score for access, use, content and watching together, and children from homes with a higher score did less well on early language and reading tests; higher scores also went with lower family income and less schooling for mothers. We searched and found no study of owning a device on its own; in the questionnaire it is one item of fifteen. Radesky and colleagues, 2020; Hutton and colleagues, 2020.

Paediatric bodies advise on this; the studies under the advice are thin, and we found none testing a choice like this one.

Guidance, not a study: the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2026, suggests waiting with a personal tablet.

Nothing here says what a device of her own does for a child of three. We searched and found no study of that choice alone.

Not for everyone: in some homes a hand-me-down tablet is the only way a parent's phone stays free for work, and that is a good reason.

[illegible]

One Episode

Ines, this one comes with the report rather than from your answers. Here is a story about Jonah.

Jonah cooks at Ferry Street Kitchen, a small restaurant. It is closed on Sundays and Mondays, and those are Jonah's nights with Ezra. Ezra, who is four, arrives on Sunday at noon with a backpack and a toy rabbit. He goes back on Tuesday morning. In between, the two of them live above the restaurant. In the afternoon they walk down to the bridge to look at the heron. It stands there like a man who is still deciding to miss the bus.

The evening goes like this: bath, pyjamas, and then one episode on the laptop in Jonah's bed, with Ezra against his shoulder. The bath is where the rabbit's news gets told, at length. Tonight the rabbit has been to the moon. The programme is about a dog who is a detective and wears a hat. It started because Jonah had never ended a day alone with a small child. The episode gave the evening an order he could follow, like the order slips in his kitchen: bath, dog, teeth, light. It is also, he would admit, the one half hour of his week when he sits still and somebody leans on him.

Tonight the laptop wants to update itself. It shows a grey bar and takes its time. They lie there and wait for it, and the bar creeps across.

Then it finishes, and they watch the dog in the hat, the same as ever. Ezra tells the dog who did it, as he does every week, and the dog does not listen.

Afterwards, with the light out, Jonah lies awake for a while and turns it over. He could not say whether this evening was different from any other. He has never timed how long Ezra takes to fall asleep, and he is not going to start. A kitchen has enough clocks in it. At Ezra's other home the day ends another way, and that is a good way as well. Here it ends with a dog in a hat.

He does not know if it should. He knows he would miss the shoulder.

He closes the laptop and puts it on the floor by the bed. He will step on it in the morning, as he does every Monday.

A note from us. No practice has been tested here, so this note offers none. The story shows an evening as it is in one of a child's two homes, and a parent who does not know whether to change it.

 NOTES

Where this comes from: a review of studies on young children's screens and sleep, and a review of how problem use is measured in small children. In the first, more screen time in a day, and screen time in the evening, went with poorer sleep. When its results on how long children sleep were pooled, this held for babies and toddlers and was not confirmed for preschoolers, and its authors rated the quality of the whole body of evidence as very low. In the second, use before sleep and a device in the bedroom went with measures of poorer sleep. Janssen and colleagues, 2020; Selak and colleagues, 2025.

Paediatric bodies advise on this. We looked for a study that tested a choice like this one and did not find one.

Guidance, not a study: the Canadian Paediatric Society, November 2022, and the UK Department for Education, March 2026, advise no screens in the hour before bed.

What an episode before bed does for a child of this age, one evening cannot tell you.

Not for everyone: in two homes the day may end in two ways, and that is ordinary.

[illegible]

A Bed for Everything

The day is nearly done.

The window is the colour of honey.

"Everything has a bed," says Auntie.

"Everything?" asks Tam.

"Everything. Come and see."

You could ask: What do you think has a bed in this house?

Where do the shoes sleep?

By the door, in a row.

Big shoes and small shoes, side by side.

They walked a long way today.

Everything has a bed.

You could ask: Where do your shoes sleep at night?

Where does the cup sleep?

On the rack, upside down.

Drip, drop, drip.

"That's how cups like it," says Auntie.

Everything has a bed.

You could try: Read "Everything has a..." and wait. Your child may finish it.

Where does the broom sleep?

In the corner of the kitchen, standing up.

"Brooms sleep standing, like horses," says Auntie.

Everything has a bed.

Where does the spoon sleep?

In the drawer, with all the other spoons,

spoon in spoon, snug as can be.

Everything has a bed.

Where does the watering can sleep?

In the hall, by the big flowerpot, still a little wet.

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Its long nose points up at the coats.

Everything has a bed.

Where does the cat sleep?

Auntie looks. Tam looks.

Not by the door. Not on the rack. Not in the drawer.

The cat is in a cardboard box, far too small for her.

"Everything has a bed," says Auntie.

"The cat picks her own," says Tam.

You could ask: If you could pick any bed in this house, where would it be?

Auntie sits down in the big chair

and lifts Tam up beside her.

"And where do we go?" asks Tam.

"Right here, for now," says Auntie.

The house is quiet. Everything is in its place.

And the cat is in the box.

Why this is here. A quiet story: a walk round a house where everything has somewhere to rest.

Where this comes from: trials of programmes that showed parents how to share picture books and talk about them. Children's language grew more than in families without the programme. In the shortest programmes the gain was not clear, and the difference between short and longer ones was not clearly shown either. A review of one talk-rich style found its extra gain smaller for four- and five-year-olds, and for children from lower-income homes or whose mothers had less schooling. Another review, of book-sharing led by parents, teachers or researchers, found the gain small, close to none when the comparison was another activity, and not clear later on. A recent, pre-registered trial of a parent-led programme that combined shared reading with teaching words and story-telling found no more language growth than in families without it. The programmes, not this story, were tested. Dowdall and colleagues, 2020; Mol and colleagues, 2008; Noble and colleagues, 2019; Burgoyne and colleagues, 2025.

 NOTES

The Little Wall

Mo and Bit live among the shoes by the door.

Mo is round and likes to go fast.

Bit is long and likes to go far.

The hall smells of wet coats, and the window is all rain.

Grandad is here, with his slippers on, down on the rug with Noa.

The tablet lies on the rug too, dark.

Mo sniffs the air, and Bit sniffs the air.

"Ding," goes the tablet.

"Tap, tap, tap," goes the rain on the window, all wet and grey.

Mo stops, and Bit stops.

"Which one, Bit?" asks Mo.

"DING!" says Bit.

Off we go.

You could try: Stop before the answer and let your child shout it with Bit.

Whatever your child shouts is fine; read on. Say the ding small and flat; give the rain the fingers.

Today it is Bit's turn to shout.

Over they go to the rug.

Grandad picks up the tablet, and Noa leans in under his arm.

Mo and Bit sit by Grandad's knee, at the back of the tablet.

Back here, the tablet is a little wall.

You could ask: Who do you like to lean on?

The tablet goes, and Noa laughs.

Grandad laughs too, a big slow laugh that goes on and on.

From behind the little wall, Mo and Bit hear it all.

The tablet going, the laughing, and the rain, tap, tap, tap.

You could try: Stop just before "tap, tap, tap" and let your child do the rain with their fingers on your knee.

 NOTES

Mo goes tap, tap, tap on the floor, along with the rain.

Bit goes long and thin along the edge of the rug, and listens.

Dot the dog is asleep by the door, and the rain taps on.

You could ask: What else goes tap?

Then the tablet goes quiet.

Noa puts it down on the rug, and there it lies, dark.

Grandad gets up, slow, slow, slow.

"Soup," says Mama from the kitchen.

Back among the shoes, Mo and Bit settle down.

Mo smells of rug.

Bit smells of Grandad's knee.

And the hall smells of rain, and the rain goes on tapping.

You could ask: What can you hear right now?

Why this is here. A daytime story with Mo and Bit, two small friends who came from the world of screens and live out here now. It is written so that the leaning and the listening are the best part of the story. It is for daytime, not for bed. If your child asks where Mo and Bit are: they live among the shoes by the door. A story with screens in it was not tested, and you can skip this one.

Where this comes from: as under *A Bed for Everything*.

Your answers and this report are handled by the association HDI – Human Digital Intelligence, Zagreb, which is responsible for them. For anything about your data, write to info@hdi.vision.

Thank you for taking part. What you gave was your own view of your home, and that is all this report rests on.

If anything in this report upsets you, or you want to talk it over with someone, write to info@hdi.vision and a person will answer. Questions about your data go to the same address.

Your answers are kept for twelve months from the day you finished answering, then deleted. You can ask for them to be deleted sooner at any time by quoting your pass code.

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