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# What Is an Abecedary?

Peter Nathan

**N**ot a term that most of us would immediately recognize or use, an “abecedary” is nonetheless something we would quickly identify with. Walk into any nursery or toddler’s room and you’re bound to find at least one abecedary in the form of a poster or a book.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* informs us that the term, which is formed from the first four letters of the alphabet, first appeared in 15th-century English and derives from the Latin *abecedarium*. It was used to describe a child’s alphabet book. Obviously, at that time only families of substance were able to provide their children with books and education.

The word came to be applied to alphabetical listings in the 16th century before disappearing from usage in the 19th. Today it has been resurrected to apply to archaeological discoveries relating to alphabets.