

Building Readers®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Literacy Initiative
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Build your child's vocabulary

Research shows that kids who are good at comprehending what they read are likely to have good vocabularies. It makes sense that the more words kids know, the better they understand reading materials. To turn vocabulary learning into a game:



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- **“Draw” words.** Write vocabulary words on scraps of paper. Take turns drawing a word from a basket or bowl. Then use the word in a sentence or say what it means.
- **Play “word checkers.”** Tape vocabulary words on the black squares of a checkerboard. When players land on a word, they read it aloud and review its definition.
- **Make a “word wall.”** When your child has a list of words to learn, post each on a wall or bulletin board. Have her sort them into categories (such as synonyms or words that start with the same letter). This will help her remember them more easily.

Sources: Michael Pressley, “How Can Reading Comprehension Be Improved Through Research-Validated Instruction?” Reading Online, www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=handbook/pressley/index.html and “Vocabulary Building: Teach New Words at Home,” MSN encarta, <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/departments/elementary/?article=vocabbuild>.

“I would be most content if my children grew up to be the kind of people who think decorating consists mostly of building enough bookshelves.”

—Anna Quindlen

‘Life story’ book can encourage leisure reading

If your child only reads when he “has” to, try presenting something irresistible: stories about him! Create a “life story” book that celebrates his experiences and accomplishments. Include photos and mementos if possible. Keep adding to it as the months go by, allowing your child to contribute. (Using a loose-leaf binder makes this easy.) You might recall the day he was born, for example, while he might describe a favorite vacation. Read it together often. You may be surprised by what he remembers and treasures!

Source: “Reading Stories,” Raising Children Network, http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/stories_-_cyh.html#parents.

Librarians aid learning



Your child is assigned his first research project—writing a report about polar bears. But neither of you is sure how to find the right books for him. It's time to consult the children's librarian. She can help with other issues, too, such as:

- **Using** references that can't be checked out.
- **Finding** helpful magazines and newspapers.
- **Teaching** your child how to use library materials independently.

Source: Lisa Wroble, “Parent Involvement in Education: Helping Your Child with Library Research,” EduGuide, www.eduguide.org/Parents-Library/Parent-Involvement-in-Education-Library-Research-176.aspx.

Try ‘talking’ a story



If your child struggles with creative writing, start with creative talking. Encourage her to tell a story aloud. You can even offer to make a recording of it. Talking first can make writing easier.

Break out of the writing rut



Writing doesn't always have to involve pencils and paper. For an exciting change, have your child write and practice spelling words with:

- **A wet paintbrush** on the sidewalk.
- **Icing** on a cake.
- **Play dough** or clay.
- **Shaving cream** on a plate.
- **Light chalk** on black paper.

Source: Julie Rebboah, “17 Activities That Teach Writing Without Worksheets!” ESL Teachers Board, www.eslteachersboard.com/cgi-bin/lessons/index.pl?read=2860.

Help your child get the most out of textbooks

Reading a textbook is different from reading a storybook. Your child will have to learn how to pick out the main ideas in a chapter and decipher new terms. To get your child started, look at the book together. Notice the:

- **Table of contents.** Use it to preview what he will learn and to build interest and excitement.
- **Index.** Practice finding specific topics.
- **Sections.** Notice introductions, headings, summaries, images and more.
- **Style.** Why are some things in bold? Italics? Numbered?
- **Features.** Textbooks often include helpful tools, such as glossaries and sample questions.

Source: "Reading: How to Read a Textbook," Literacy Matters, www.literacymatters.org/content/readandwrite/textbook.htm.

Parent-teacher teamwork gets reading results

Keeping in touch with your child's teachers is one of the best ways to encourage reading success. It shows that you're a team—and that together you support your child. When discussing reading, address topics such as:

- **Your child's reading level.**
- **Appropriate expectations for your child.**
- **Books your child can read.**
- **How motivated your child is to read.**
- **Ways you can build reading skills at home.**



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- **How to help your child as she reads.**
- **Reading-related resources for parents.**

Source: "Helping your child learn to read—a parent's guide," Ontario Ministry of Education, www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/earlyreading/index.html#teacher.



Q: I admit it—I don't love to read. Will this hurt my child's reading success?

A: You don't have to love reading to believe—and show—that it's important.

When you incorporate reading into family routines in small ways, such as by sharing the Sunday comics or reading aloud each night, you make a big difference. As veteran reading specialist Alethea Eason notes, "I've rarely found a child who does not like to read if his or her parents read."

Source: "Interview with Reading Specialist Alethea Eason," suite101.com, http://teaching-strategies-mentorship.suite101.com/article.cfm/interview_with_reading_specialist_alethea_eason.

Do you have a question about reading? Email readingadvisor@parent-institute.com.



For lower elementary readers:

Millions of Cats by Wanda Gag (Puffin). An old couple wants a new cat, but choosing isn't easy! In this award-winning classic, trillions of cats are narrowed down to one.

Max Malone Makes a Million by Charlotte Herman (Red Feather Books). An article inspires Max Malone and his buddy Gordy to make money. But will they be outdone by a six-year-old?

For upper elementary readers:

Joey Fly, Private Eye by Aaron Reynolds (Henry Holt). Delilah Butterfly is missing her pencil box, and Joey Fly is on the case. This graphic novel appeals to fans of detectives—and insects.

There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom by Louis Sachar (Yearling). A troubled fifth grader gains confidence and success with help from a new school counselor and a new friend.

To do this fall: Read more!



Try this activity with your elementary student: Talk about books your child enjoyed last year.

Make a list of "Great Books from Last Year."

Then, have your child write down books or authors she would like to read soon. (Check your library's list of children's books for ideas, or look on a bookseller's website for new titles.) Title it "Books I Want to Read This Fall." Post the list in an easy-to-see place and get started!

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