



*What Parents  
Can Do at Home to  
Help Students With*  
**Reading**



**R**eading is a key to success in school for students of all ages. Children who are good readers find it easier to do well in other subjects because so much of learning depends on the ability to read. From history to science to geography to math word problems, reading is an important part of learning in every school subject.

Reading also opens doors to a world of pleasure and enjoyment. Children who enjoy reading can find books that will help them travel through time and space. And they can go online to read headlines in today's London newspaper, exchange email with a pen pal in New Zealand or follow a scientist to the bottom of the ocean. These opportunities are not available to kids who don't read well.

This booklet includes activities and suggestions that will help you encourage your child to read at home. You'll also find tips for boosting phonics skills and reading comprehension, making reading fun and helping your child develop a lifelong love of reading. These tips come from parents, experienced reading teachers and specialists who work every day with students who have difficulty reading.

The ideas in this booklet will help your child develop a healthy interest in reading, an appreciation of why reading is so important and a positive attitude about reading in *and* out of school.



Stock No. 315A

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## Read Aloud

**T**he single most important way to encourage a love of reading in your child is to read aloud. Set aside some time every day—try for at least 15 minutes. Read things you enjoy and books your child loves. Read funny poems, fairy tales or sports articles. It doesn't matter what you read—as long as you read!



## Help Your Child 'Hear' the Excitement in a Book

Poor readers sometimes struggle so hard to figure out each word that they never catch the excitement of a book. If this describes your child, you might encourage reading along with an audiobook. Check them out from the public library or download them from the library's website. Your child will learn to read new words—and start to understand why people get so excited about reading.



# Invite Your Child to Read Aloud

**W**eave reading practice into everyday life by having your child read aloud.



- **Ask your child** to read a recipe to you while you are cooking.
- **Ask an older child** to read to a younger child.
- **Take turns reading aloud** when you and your child read together.
- **Schedule a reading dinner.** Invite each family member to bring a book to the dinner table and read a favorite section to the entire family.
- **Ask your child to read aloud** from a library book while you are riding in the car. Everyone can take turns reading aloud on a long trip. It's good practice and the miles will fly by.
- **Have your child read the weather report** from the newspaper or a website while getting ready for school.
- **Encourage your child to present "newscasts"** or "special reports" to you, friends or the whole family. Have your child read news articles about sports, fashion or science or even read from a catalog or favorite magazine.
- **Have your child read aloud from comics** while imitating what the characters might sound like.

# Teach Your Child to Ask Questions

**G**ood readers are curious. They often stop to ask questions about what they're reading, which boosts their comprehension. Here are some ways you can help your child learn to ask questions:

- **Talk about why characters do what they do.** If you're reading *Charlotte's Web* together, you might ask, "Why do you suppose Charlotte decided to help Wilbur?"
- **Encourage your child to make meaningful connections** with the book. Ask, "Have you ever felt like that? Would you have done what this character did? How might you have handled this situation differently?"
- **Wonder about the what-ifs.** Get your child to imagine a different ending for the book. What if the ring Bilbo found (in *The Hobbit*) hadn't made him invisible—but instead had made him 15 feet tall? What if Jo had married Laurie (in *Little Women*)?



## Play With Phonics

**L**earning to read is like unlocking a code. Each letter or letter combination represents one or more specific sounds. Playing with phonics can help your child remember them—and become a strong reader. Try these activities:

- **Put a set of magnetic letters** or letter tiles in a bowl. Have your child pull one out, name the letter and say the sound it makes. Now challenge your child to look around the house for items that begin with that letter sound. For *b*, items might include a book, a banana and a bed. Play this game with ending sounds, too. If the letter is *t*, your child might find a plant, a mat and a bracelet.



- **Play I Spy.** Take turns naming a vowel sound (like short *a* or long *e*) or a letter combination (like *ch* or *tr*). The other player has to think of a word that contains that sound or combination.
- **Help your child make an alphabet book** by writing each letter on a separate sheet of paper, writing a word that starts with that letter and drawing a picture. Invite your child to read the completed book to you.

# Look for High-Interest, Easy-Reading Books

A child's reading ability and age don't always match. A 12-year-old who reads at the third-grade level will probably be bored with books most third graders would enjoy, and feel embarrassed to carry around a "babyish" book when friends are reading more grown-up titles. That boredom and embarrassment may keep your child from reading—which is exactly what you *don't* want.

If your child reads below grade level, you can still find books that will spark interest. Ask a librarian or your child's teacher to suggest titles. In general, you should look for books that have:

- **A small number** of difficult words.
- **Short passages** that deliver clear messages.
- **Helpful illustrations.**
- **Subheadings** that will help your child understand the flow of ideas in the book.

News articles are also effective. Most articles are short, all have headlines that tell what the story is about, and many have images that help readers figure out what's going on. Ask your child's teacher to recommend some appropriate websites as well.



## Reading in Bed Is a Great Idea

Help your child develop the reading-in-bed habit. You can encourage a younger child to read by pushing back bedtime by 20 to 30 minutes on a Friday or Saturday night to provide extra time for reading in bed.

## Find Reading Role Models

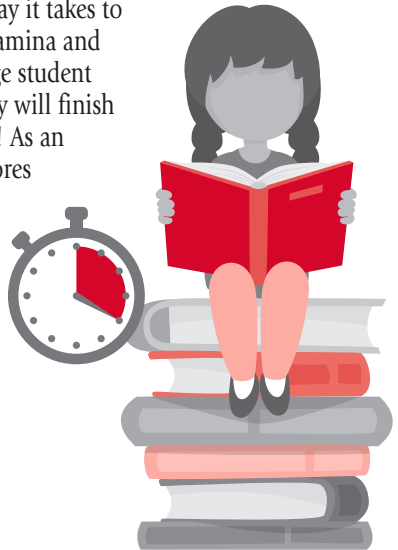
**W**hen young readers see people they admire reading, they will probably be motivated to read, too! One way to encourage children to read more is by having role models like grandparents and older cousins read to and with them. Ask them to recommend books they treasured when they were younger. Children can also watch videos of favorite authors and celebrities reading aloud online.

## Encourage All Kinds of Reading

Is your child hooked on graphic novels or on a book series that seems silly to you? Don't worry! As children devour these books, their reading gets faster and better. At the same time, they're learning to ask the kinds of questions that good readers always ask: What is causing the strange noises coming from the big house on the hill? And why doesn't anyone in town want to talk about it?

## Try the 20-Minute Miracle

Encourage your child to read 20 minutes a day. That's what experts say it takes to develop reading fluency, stamina and comprehension. The average student who reads 20 minutes a day will finish more than 25 books a year! As an added plus, your child's scores on standardized tests will probably go up. There is a direct relationship between reading and test scores.





## Less Screen Time = More Reading Time

The time your child spends in front of a screen could be time spent reading, so don't make it too easy for your child to turn on digital devices. For example, if you have a television in the kitchen, remove it. Put a bookshelf there instead. Keep it filled with comic books, magazines and other things that are easy to read. Your child can read a short magazine article while waiting for the microwave to heat up a snack or check out the sports page while downing a bowl of cereal. And make sure there's no TV or game system in your child's bedroom!

## Help Your Reluctant Reader Get Into the Reading Habit

Some older kids seem to turn off to reading. It isn't that they *can't* read, but that they *don't* read. Their reading skills get rusty, reading takes longer and they avoid it even more.

If your child is a reluctant reader, you might try these tips:

- **Start small.** Find a single article that your child can read in a 15- or 20-minute sitting.
- **Match your child's interests.** A sports fan may enjoy reading a sports magazine or a biography of a favorite athlete. A horse lover might like a series of novels about ponies or nonfiction books on famous horses.
- **Ask for suggestions.** Your local librarian can tell you about books that appeal to older kids.
- **Think funny.** Humor books can make even the most reluctant reader see that there's entertainment value to reading.



# Use 'Active Reading' to Boost Comprehension

There's a big difference between *learning to read* and *reading to learn*. Often, children finish reading an assignment and don't understand what they've read. Here are some techniques to help your child become an active reader and comprehend reading material:

- **See the big picture.** Before starting to read an assignment, have your child do a quick preview. What is the title of the chapter or assignment? Does it give any clues as to what the reading assignment may be about?

Now look for chapter headings or subheadings, words in **boldface**, pictures or graphs. All these should help your child have an idea of the big picture before starting to read.

- **Take notes.** Taking notes while reading will make it easier to study and review. But it will also make reading more active and engaging.

Your child should write down the most important ideas in the reading assignment (these are often in **boldface** or *italics*). Notes don't have to be long—the purpose isn't to rewrite the material—and they don't have to be neat, since only your child will see them.

- **Relate the reading to previous knowledge.** The best way to remember new information is by relating it to something a student has already learned. When your child finishes a reading assignment, suggest writing a short paragraph answering questions like these:
  - *What was the main topic of this chapter? How is it similar to something else you have learned?*
  - *What key ideas or points did you already know?*
  - *What did you learn that was completely new to you?*

# Help Your Child Navigate Reading Roadblocks

**A**t one time or another, most children have trouble understanding something they read. Maybe it's a science chapter that just doesn't make sense. Maybe it's a history lesson that seems confusing. Before your child gets too frustrated, suggest these ideas:

- **Look up unfamiliar words.** If your child doesn't understand one or two words, this may be all it takes.
- **Look for clues.** What is the chapter about? (Check the headings and subheadings.) Do the pictures illustrate key ideas?
- **Reread.** Have your child go back and read the confusing sentence or paragraph. Ask what's confusing. Sometimes, that will clear things up.
- **Skip it.** If one sentence or paragraph is the problem, the next section may make things clearer.
- **Read something else** on the same topic. Your child might look online for an article on the same subject.
- **Ask the teacher for help** if the trouble continues.



# Start a Parent-Child Book Club

**L**ooking for a way to share some special times with your child—while encouraging a love of reading? One idea is to start a parent-child book club. This is a great way to stay in touch with children as they grow—book clubs work well for children of all ages.

Here are some tips on starting a club of your own:

- **Talk with other parents** about your idea. Start with the parents of your child's friends, but also look for ways to meet other people who might be interested. Perhaps a parent and child you always see in the library would like to be part of a group.



- **Plan a first meeting.** Many public libraries make meeting rooms available free of charge. Schools or places of worship may also have rooms you can use. If the group is small enough, you could take turns meeting in one another's homes. You could even meet online.
- **Choose a reading list.** Ask everyone to suggest a book or two that they have read and enjoyed, or a book they would like to read. Ask your librarian for suggestions. Your child's teacher may also have recommendations.

- **Open a discussion** by asking general questions such as:
  - *What is the main idea of the story?*
  - *Are there similarities between the characters' lives and your own? How are they similar? Different?*
  - *Who is your favorite character? Why?*
  - *Can you think of a different ending for the story?*



- **Be good role models.** Book clubs offer children a chance to see how to disagree respectfully, how to share thoughts and ideas clearly, how to relate what's in a book to their own lives and how to think deeply about what they've read. Parents can help children develop those skills by modeling them in the group.

# Make Reading an Important Family Activity

## Make Sure Your Child Sees You Reading

Setting a good example is always the best way to teach children. If you want to encourage reading, make sure your child has plenty of opportunities to see you reading books, magazines and news articles every day.

Make it a point to talk with your child about what you are reading. Share a funny story you've just read. Talk about something you've read that surprised you. Ask for your child's opinion on an article and pass it along for your child to read. When you make it clear that reading is part of your everyday life, you'll find that reading soon becomes part of your child's life, too.

## Make Reading a Part of Your Family Traditions

Holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and other special occasions offer great opportunities for the entire family to sit down and read something special together. Reading about a holiday together can make the holiday more meaningful.

Reading a favorite story together on your child's birthday is a fun way for the whole family to celebrate year after year. And best of all, when you read together you are making family memories as well as building reading skills. Start a tradition of giving books as gifts, too. Give your child at least one book on every birthday.



# Help Your Child Keep a Positive Attitude

If your child is struggling with reading while classmates are not, it may be hard to maintain a good attitude. Help your child focus on effort and progress instead of making comparisons with others. Above all, make it clear that you're proud of your child and you have confidence that together you'll meet this challenge.

Of all the things you can do to encourage school success and achievement, none can compare in importance to helping your child develop strong reading skills!



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Published by:

**THE**  
**PARENT**  
INSTITUTE®

(800) 756-5525  
[www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com)

Stock No:  
*(English)* 315A  
*(Spanish)* 415A