

BUILDING READERS®

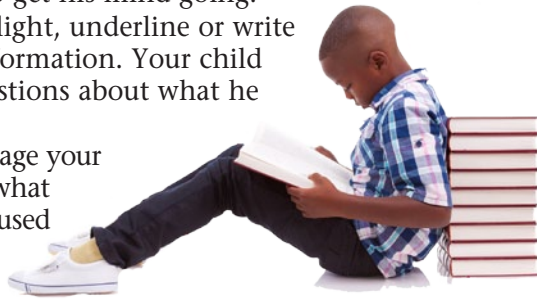
How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Harvard Elementary School

Reading is important in all subjects

Reading a novel in language arts and reading a science textbook require different skills. When your child is reading in a subject such as math, social studies or science, suggest that he use these strategies before, during and after reading:

- **Before reading.** Even before he opens the book, have your child think about what he already knows about the topic. He can jot down a few notes to get his mind going.
- **During reading.** Highlight, underline or write down important information. Your child can ask himself questions about what he is reading.
- **After reading.** Encourage your child to summarize what he read. If he is confused about something, have him go back and reread that section. Then he can see if he can make connections to things he already knows.



Source: V.G. Johnson and J.A. Mongo, "Literacy Across the Curriculum in Urban Schools," NAESP, niswc.com/readingallsubjects.

"The ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive."

—Malcolm X

A game to review synonyms and antonyms

Using *synonyms* (words with similar meanings) and *antonyms* (words with opposite meanings) can build your child's vocabulary. Try this easy game to help your child learn to use them. To play:

1. **The first player names an adjective** (a describing word), such as *excellent*. Then, she calls out a synonym of that word, like *wonderful*.
2. **The second player gives an antonym** (opposite)—in this case, *terrible*. That player then names another word and a synonym (for example, *bright* and *dazzling*) for which the first player can name an antonym (*dim*).

In a variation of this game, the first player names a word and its antonym, such as *mean* and *nice*. The next player names another synonym for each of those words (*rotten* and *kind*).

Source: T. Augarde, *The Oxford A to Z of Word Games*, Oxford University Press.

Oral language leads to strong reading

Oral language, which is made up of speaking and listening, is an important part of your child's literacy development. Strong oral language skills go hand-in-hand with good reading skills.

To hone your child's oral language skills:

- **Build** her vocabulary.
- **Model** correct grammar.
- **Ask** questions and converse daily.



Source: C. Genishi, "Young Children's Oral Language Development," Reading Rockets, niswc.com/whatisoralanguage.

Use your child's name as inspiration for brainstorming words

Ask your child to use a dictionary to write down 10 useful words that begin with the first letter of his name. Have him define the words, and help him put them in alphabetical order.

Then ask your child to write a sentence for each word and read it aloud to you.



Venn diagrams organize comparisons

Venn diagrams are graphic organizers that help clarify similarities and differences your child may encounter while reading. All he needs is a pencil and paper. Then he should:

1. **Draw two overlapping circles.**
2. **Write the similarities** between the objects he's comparing (such as two characters) in the overlapping section.
3. **Write the differences** in the sections that do not overlap.



Source: "Graphic Organizers," Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Company, niswc.com/venndiagram.

What are literature circles?

If your child comes home from school raving about how much fun his literature circle is, he's talking about a small group meeting during his reading class.

Similar to book clubs, literature circles are a way for students to read books together in an informal way. They often have some choice in their book selection, and students sometimes have jobs within the group, such as vocabulary checker or discussion director. Literature circles allow for students to learn collaboratively and take on the responsibility for leading their own discussions and activities about books.



Ask your child what book his literature circle is reading. You might choose to read the same one so you can talk about it at home!

Source: L.S. Fink, "Literature Circles: Getting Started," Read Write Think, niswc.com/whatareliteraturecircles.

Reading encourages good grammar

The more your child reads, the better his grammar will be. He will take note of proper grammar that published authors use—and he'll gain familiarity with language specific to different types of writing. For example, reading poetry may expose him to a variety of new adjectives.



Source: M. Stratford, "How Can Reading Improve Your Grammar & Writing?" Global Post, niswc.com/grammarreading.

For lower elementary readers:

- *Flight of the Honey Bee* by Raymond Huber (Candlewick). Follow Scout, a honey bee, on her journey to find a flower full of nectar. This book includes many fascinating facts about honey bees.

- *The Moon Ring* by Randy DuBurke (Chronicle). Grandma tells Maxine that there's magic in a blue moon. After she wishes on it, Maxine sets off on an exciting adventure.



For upper elementary readers:

- *Flora and Ulysses* by Kate DiCamillo (Candlewick). When Flora's pet squirrel Ulysses has an unfortunate incident with a vacuum cleaner, both he and Flora gain superhero strength—and begin several adventures as quite a dynamic duo.

- *I Am Jack* by Susanne Gervay (Tricycle). After Jack is bullied at school, he'd rather be anywhere else but there. With the support of his family, he finds a way to prevail.

Ask questions to get your child thinking

When you get your child to talk about what she's reading, it boosts her memory, critical thinking and comprehension. Ask her the following questions:

- **Why did you select** your book?
- **What is it** about?
- **Where does the story** take place? Why is that important to the story?
- **Who is your favorite** character?
- **What is the most interesting** part of the book to you?
- **What main idea** do you think the author was trying to get across?
- **What conflict** is important to the story?



- **Did you like** how the story ended? How would you have written it differently?

Source: C. Fuller, *Teaching Your Child to Write*, Berkley Books.



Q: My daughter's teacher says she is reading at grade level. How can I make sure she continues to improve?

A: Make reading an important part of family life. Ask your child to read out loud to you often. If she stumbles on a word, give her clues to help her figure it out, but don't dwell on it. It's more important for her to enjoy reading than to get every word right.

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

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