

# BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Harvard Elementary School

## Ask your child to be your family's own 'reference librarian'

Help teach your child how to look for information by asking him to be your family's reference librarian. Ask your child a question and encourage him to find the answer. Suggest that he use the Internet or the library to do his research.

Consider these questions to get your child started:

- **Who was the first astronaut** to walk on the moon? What else happened on that space mission?
- **What was the largest dinosaur** that ever lived? Where did it live?
- **What happens if people** don't get enough sleep?

Remember to adjust your questions to match your child's interest and ability. When your child finds the information you requested, compliment his effort. Say, "I'm impressed. I didn't know that. Tell me where you found that information."

**Source:** S. Bennett, *The Plugged-in Parent*, Random House.

*"You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me."*

—C.S. Lewis



## Review language with word games

It's much easier to remember grammar rules if you use them often. Playing word games is a fun way to do this. Here are some examples:

- **Take turns thinking of adjectives** that describe something, such as a rainy day. You might choose *wet*, *misty*, *damp* or *overcast*. How many can your child think of?
- **Use the pronouns** *I*, *me*, *we* and *us* in sentences. Have one person say a sentence, and the other guess if it's grammatically correct. For example, "My friends and *I* will go together" is correct. "My friends and *me* will go together" is not.
- **Define prefixes and suffixes** (the beginnings and ends of words). For example, the prefix *non* means "not," as in *nonstop*. The suffix *ful*, means "having," as in *healthful*.

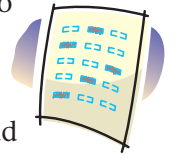
**Source:** V. Perrone, *101 Educational Conversations With Your 5th Grader*, Chelsea House Publishers.

## Practice reading before tests

To succeed on tests, children must read well and comprehend what they read. Even math tests include reading important instructions. To help your child prepare for tests:

- **Boost reading skills** whenever possible. Read together daily. Introduce your child to new words.
- **Review homework directions carefully.** What words are used often? Help your child practice difficult directions.

**Source:** "Help Your Child Improve in Test-Taking," U.S. Department of Education, [www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/TestTaking/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/TestTaking/index.html).



## Simply talk with your child to improve vocabulary

Talk with your child as you do your daily activities together. Talk about what you are doing. Ask questions. It's one of the best ways to build a strong vocabulary—which will build a strong reader!

**Source:** Read\*Write\*Now! Simple Things Families Can Do to Help, [www2.ed.gov/PDFDocs/simple.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/PDFDocs/simple.pdf).



## Have your child try graphic novels

Graphic novels—books that use pictures and words to convey their stories—offer more than just entertainment.

Many address relevant and complex social issues. They cover and stimulate reading in diverse genres of literature, like mystery, fantasy and historical fiction.

Suggest that your child read a graphic novel. Ask your librarian to help you find some that she would enjoy.

**Source:** F. Goldsmith, "YA Talk: Graphic Novels," *Booklist Magazine*, American Library Association, <http://tinyurl.com/me97g2a>.



## Reading activities with newspapers can help boost your child's critical thinking skills

Grab a newspaper and try these easy activities. You'll improve your child's critical thinking skills while also staying informed about world happenings!

- 1. Have your child read** a short editorial on a subject that interests him. Have him underline all the facts with a red pen. Then have him underline opinions with a blue pen. This teaches him the skill of classifying.
- 2. Cut the headline off** a newspaper article. Do not show the headline to your child. Have your child read the article and come up with a headline of his own. Then show him the headline. Is the headline he wrote similar to the actual one? This activity reinforces the skill of summarizing.



### Encourage reading and writing with a reading journal

A reading journal can help your child remember and organize what she's read. To keep a reading journal, your child can:



- **Write a paragraph or two** about what she has read.
- **Keep track** of books she has read.
- **Remember authors** she likes.
- **Spark ideas** for book reports.

### For lower elementary readers:

- **Ollie the Purple Elephant** by Jarrett J. Krosoczka (Alfred A. Knopf). When Ollie the Purple Elephant comes home, everyone loves him—except for the cat.



- **Pluto Visits Earth** by Steve Metzger (Orchard Books). When Pluto finds out that astronomers have named him a dwarf planet, he gets upset and travels to Earth to demand that he be a real planet again.

### For upper elementary readers:

- **Love, Amalia** by Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel M. Zubizarreta (Atheneum). Amalia has a very special relationship with her Abuelita. Abuelita always knows the right thing to say and do, no matter what Amalia is feeling.
- **Anyway\*** by Arthur Salm (Simon and Schuster). Join Max as he tells the story of going to family camp—complete with funny footnotes and drawings, and plenty of exaggerations.

## Time lines can help when reading history

Your child is reading about the American Revolution, but she's having trouble remembering all those names and dates. Help her put things in order by having her make a time line.

Time lines make it easier to see how one thing led to another, how much time passed between events and how to put ideas into context. A time line helps to give a sense of sequence to history. Encourage your child to create a time line for each significant event she reads about in her history book. Offer these tips:

- **Set boundaries.** When did the event begin? When did it end?
- **Identify important events.** Help her summarize key points.



- **Add color.** She might mark battles in green, or birth and death dates in blue.

**Source:** L.J. Zwier and G. Mathes, *Study Skills for Success*, University of Michigan Press.



**Q:** My child watches too much TV during his school breaks. How can I get him to read more?

**A:** Breaking the TV habit requires planning. Have your child choose the shows he most wants to watch. Then help him make a schedule allowing for no more than two hours a day of viewing time. Plan interesting activities and provide exciting reading materials, and he'll have plenty to keep himself busy.

Do you have a question about reading? Email [readingadvisor@parent-institute.com](mailto:readingadvisor@parent-institute.com).

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