

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Harvard Elementary School

Dive into the world of poetry

There are countless types of poetry. Explore several of them with your child!

First, read a few books of poetry together. Notice elements of each poem such as the rhythm of words, repetition or the location of line breaks.

Then, experiment with reading—and writing—different types of poems, including:

- **Haiku poems.** This Japanese form of poetry features three-line poems with a specific number of syllables on each line.
- **Song lyrics.** Have your child write down the lyrics to a favorite song. Compare the structure of the lyrics to that of some of the poems you've read.
- **Acrostic poems.** The first letters of each line of the poem should spell out a word, such as your child's name. Have your child write an acrostic poem about his best qualities!



Source: "Help a Child Write a Poem," ReadWriteThink, www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/tips-howtos/help-child-write-poem-30317.html.

"To read is to voyage through time."

—Carl Sagan

Playing this 'firsts and lasts' game can help reinforce phonics and spelling skills

Here's a great way to help your child with phonics and spelling while having some fun! It's also an easy game to play while you're waiting in line or doing errands.

Choose a category, such as animals. One person names an animal—for example, "Toad." The next person has to think of an animal that starts with the last letter of that word. So the next player might say "Dog." The next player could respond with "Goat," and so on.

Other categories might include geography, foods or plants. As your child gets older, make the categories more difficult—instead of geography, choose states or countries.

Find ways to make reading fun

Try something new to show your child just how much fun reading can be. For example:

- **Get into character.** Don't just read out loud with your child—act it out!
- **Make a map.** Draw a map of the setting where a story takes place.
- **Invite a character to dinner.** Plan a menu the character would like.



Have your child read a wide variety of books

Encourage your child to read about a variety of people and things. She doesn't have to finish a book if she doesn't like it. But reading different kinds of books will help her discover new interests and ideas. And she'll be strengthening her reading skills in the process!



Imagination and experience can improve your child's memory

To improve your child's memory of what she reads, the words she reads need to be meaningful.

Have her draw pictures that represent new or difficult words. She can use mnemonic devices to remember lists or spelling words.



Whenever possible, add some excitement! If she's learning about another country, for example, learn a traditional song from that country.

Source: P.L. Vail, *Seize the Meaning!*, Kaplan.

Help your child make the most of the library

Encourage your child to take full advantage of all that the library has to offer. Try some of these activities during your next trip to the library:



- **Have a scavenger hunt.** Write down a list of facts that your child should look up, such as Abraham Lincoln's birthday, the tallest mountain in the world and the capital of Thailand. See how fast your child can utilize the reference section of the library!
- **Check out the news.** Grab a newspaper and an atlas. Look up where important things are happening around the world.
- **Explore different resources.** Does your local library have a genealogy room? What about a special section with information on your town's history? Check out these parts of the library together.

Source: "10 Teachable Moments at the Library," Scholastic, www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/reading-activities/10-teachable-moments-library.

Cook up some reading and math success

What simple—and necessary—activity involves reading and math? Cooking! And it's something you and your child can do together every day. When you prepare a dish:

- **Take turns reading the recipe.** Ask your child to read the list of ingredients aloud, for example, while you collect them.
- **Let your child measure.** Set out measuring cups and spoons and teach your child how to use them.
- **Use math terms.** Say things like, "We need to *add* sugar," "Let's *divide* that into *quarters*" or "That's *half* of what we need."



- **Make more—or less.** Take an uncomplicated recipe and double—or halve—it. Do the math together. How many people will it serve?



Q: My fourth grader's teacher has asked me to work on reading with my son at home. He says reading is boring and he refuses to cooperate. What can I do?

A: Look for things your son likes to do. Then, think about how to add an element of reading to those things. Challenge him to find information on topics he likes—cars or music, for example. Then, ask him to read out loud to you about what he finds.

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

Suggest three steps for book reports

Writing a book report requires organization. Suggest that your child use a step-by-step process, such as this one:



1. **Organize.** List tasks and due dates.
2. **Focus.** Use daily to-do lists.
3. **Finish.** Make sure your child puts the final copy in his backpack!

Source: "Help Your Child Get Organized," KidsHealth, <http://tinyurl.com/mzy8gx3>.

For lower elementary readers:

- **Looking at Lincoln** by Maira Kalman (Nancy Paulsen Books). Help a young girl research Abraham Lincoln's early life, political career and more.
- **Big Mean Mike** by Michelle Knudsen (Candlewick). Mike is the biggest, meanest dog on the streets. So what will everyone think when they start seeing cute, fuzzy bunnies pop up in Mike's car?



For upper elementary readers:

- **Black and White** by David Macaulay (HMH Books for Young Readers). Four different stories are interwoven in this story—or are they? Challenge your child to make sense of this crazy book.
- **The Fantastic Family Whipple** by Matthew Ward (Razorbill). Arthur Whipple's 12 siblings hold dozens of world records—but Arthur doesn't have any! See what happens to the Whipple clan when they are faced with a mysterious curse.

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