

# BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Harvard Elementary School

## Reading for pleasure can improve your child's literacy skills

When your child enjoys reading for pleasure, he boosts his vocabulary and reading skills. To get him reading:

- **Suggest books you enjoyed** when you were young. Search for some of your favorite authors or books at the library with your child.
- **Help your child find friends** who like to read. Encourage them to discuss books they enjoy. They may consider starting a book club.
- **Keep a supply of books** and magazines on subjects that interest your child available all around your home.
- **Connect books and food.** Many adults enjoy reading at cafés. Create your own café at home. Bake a favorite dessert and make some hot chocolate, sit down with your child and spend some time reading.



Source: M. Leonhardt, *Keeping Kids Reading*, Crown Publishers.

*"Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination, and the journey. They are home."*

—Anna Quindlen

## Work with your child's teacher to set goals

When it comes to your child's reading abilities, it can be difficult to set goals. You may not be exactly sure what or how much your child should be reading. Talk to your child's teacher about:

- **Reading level.** Is your child meeting expectations for her grade? What kinds of materials are best for her? How can you tell if a book is the right level? How can you help her improve?
- **Reading habits.** Many teachers expect students to read for a certain number of minutes each day. By working as a team (perhaps by keeping a reading calendar), you and your child's teacher can support good reading habits that make a big difference.

## Explore nonfiction with your child

Readers are successful when they are able to read, understand and enjoy many types of books, including fiction and nonfiction. When your child reads nonfiction, she:



- **Applies** comprehension skills to a different text format.
- **Learns** how authors use text to inform and persuade their readers.
- **Develops** new hobbies or interests.

Source: M. Lee, "Enthralling Nonfiction for Early Readers," *education.com*, [www.education.com/magazine/article/Nonfiction\\_New\\_Readers/](http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Nonfiction_New_Readers/).

## Add some variety to routines

Change your daily reading routine every once in a while to keep it interesting for your child. One day, you might read to him. The next day, have him to read to you. Ask other family members to take turns reading with you, too.



## Ways to motivate reluctant readers

Does your child make excuses not to read? Here are some steps you can take to encourage her:

- **Find reading materials** about your child's interests.
- **Watch educational TV** programs related to what she's reading.
- **Talk about reading.** When she is able to express her thoughts, her confidence about reading grows.
- **Demonstrate how reading** is useful. Use cookbooks or newspapers in your daily activities.



Source: N.D. Collins, "Motivating Low Performing Adolescent Readers," ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading English and Communication, [www.ericdigests.org/1997-1/low.html](http://www.ericdigests.org/1997-1/low.html).

## Reviewing key terms helps with word problems

Show your child how to use his reading skills to help with his math homework! When your child has word problems for math class, he needs to be able to deconstruct the text in order to understand what he's being asked to do. Word problems require students to:

1. **Read and understand** the text.
2. **Identify what needs** to be answered.
3. **Create and solve** the equation.

Together, review key terminology for math problems that will give your child hints when he's reading. What do *increased*, *fewer than* or *difference* mean for math problems? Encourage your child to read a word problem carefully several times and look for key words.



Help him talk through what the question is asking to make sure he understands how to create and solve the correct equation.

**Source:** B. Krick-Morales, "Reading and Understanding Written Math Problems," Reading Rockets, [www.readingrockets.org/article/13281/](http://www.readingrockets.org/article/13281/).

### Use mnemonic devices to help with tricky spelling words

A *mnemonic* (pronounced "neh-mon-ic") device is a tool used to remember important information. It is a great way to help remember tricky spelling words, too. Help your child make up sentences in which the first letter of each word spells out a word she wants to remember: **Big Elephants Could Always Use Some Exercise** spells out *because*.



### For lower elementary readers:

- ***I'm Bored*** by Michael Ian Black (Simon and Schuster). Kids aren't boring—they can do cartwheels, jump and play pretend. But just try explaining that to a potato.
- ***Awesome Autumn*** by Bruce Goldstone (Henry Holt and Company). From the leaves turning color to days getting shorter, a lot happens in autumn.



### For upper elementary readers:

- ***Tua and the Elephant*** by R.P. Harris (Chronicle). When Tua is out exploring the markets in her hometown of Chiang Mai, Thailand, she comes across an elephant—and the two strike up a unique friendship.
- ***Johnny Appleseed: The Legend and the Truth*** by Jane Yolen (HarperCollins). Go beyond the legend of Johnny Appleseed and learn the true story of John Chapman.

## Teach writing lessons by making mistakes

To help your child practice her grammar skills, challenge her to "edit" your work.

Write a paragraph that has a variety of grammatical errors. Leave out a period, for example, or use lowercase letters when you should capitalize. You can also add incorrect punctuation marks, such as a period instead of a question mark. ("i went to the store on friday" or "did you see that dog today.")

Next, have your child read through your paragraph and find—and fix—all of the mistakes you made.



When she's done, review and admire her work. Need to simplify the task? Make the same mistakes in every sentence. For example, "All of these sentences need to start with a capital letter and end with a period. Can you fix them?"



**Q:** How can I encourage my child to read? We always seem to be in a hurry, so quick and easy is best.

**A:** Try combining reading activities with household chores. For example, ask your child to write out the grocery list as you name the items you need. Or have him help you plan dinner for the week by looking through cookbooks or recipe files.

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

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