

# BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Harvard Elementary School

## Creative activities can help boost your child's reading skills

Artistic activities develop your child's imagination and keep reading interesting. Here's how to encourage them:

- **Have your child draw pictures** of characters or scenes from her favorite story. Use paint, crayons, pencils or markers. Have her include the setting and other characters.
- **Design a comic book** based on one of her favorite books. She can draw a comic based on what happened in the story or she can write a completely new tale. What other adventures might the characters have?
- **Make up a simple song** about story characters together. For example, what would the three little pigs sing when the wolf is looking for them?



*"A great book should leave you with many experiences, and slightly exhausted at the end. You live several lives while reading."*

—William Styron

## Your child's favorite toys can help build important language skills

Boost your child's language and description skills by playing "stuffed animal mystery." Here's how:

1. **Gather a few of your child's stuffed animals** and put them in a pillowcase.
2. **Have your child choose one animal** from the pillowcase and describe it to you—without showing you what he picked.
3. **Encourage your child to use** good description words. These include *furry*, *strong*, *tiny* and *smooth*. Remind your child that these words are called *adjectives*.
4. **Guess which stuffed animal** your child has selected and congratulate him on all the great words he used!
5. **Switch roles** and describe an animal to him.

Source: R. Rockwell, D. Reichert Hoge and B. Searcy, "Stuffed Animal Mystery," Literacy Connections, [www.literacyconnections.com/LAStuffedAnimalMystery.php](http://www.literacyconnections.com/LAStuffedAnimalMystery.php).

## Make a big difference in just a few minutes each day

Try to get in at least 15 minutes of family reading time each day. You can:

- **Listen to audio books** while doing errands.
- **Bring magazines or books** with you to read while waiting in lines or at the doctor's office.
- **Tuck your child into bed** at night with a short story.



## Encourage your child to look up new information

Make your child the official family fact checker. If you need to double-check a recipe, ask her to read it to you. If you're curious about the capital of Bulgaria, show her how she can look it up. She'll boost her reading—and research—skills.

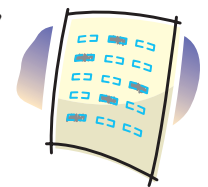


## Help your child practice following directions to prepare for tests

Taking tests is a fact of life in school, and before your child answers the first question, he needs to understand the instructions.

To help him practice, have him write down the directions to a favorite board game. Or, ask him to look through a newspaper article and circle all the nouns and underline all of the verbs.

Time your child as he completes these tasks—tests often have time limits.



## Help your child use all the information available in textbooks

If your child uses a textbook, help her locate all the places she might find information. In addition to reading the paragraphs of text, encourage your child to:



- **Take note of the words** that are in bold or italic type. These subject headings and key words will help her recognize important concepts.
- **Look at information** in other forms, such as infographics, charts and pictures.
- **Read information that is pulled out** of the main text into sidebars.
- **Review and answer** the questions at the beginning and end of each chapter.

Source: "Study and test-taking strategies for kids with learning difficulties," Great Schools, [www.greatschools.org/students/academic-skills/627-study-and-test-taking-strategies-for-kids-with-learning-difficulties.gs?page=all](http://www.greatschools.org/students/academic-skills/627-study-and-test-taking-strategies-for-kids-with-learning-difficulties.gs?page=all).

## Mealtime talk leads to school success

Mealtime never has to be boring. With a little imagination, it can be a time for the whole family to have fun together and learn.

The language skills kids learn during meals can help them improve their reading, listening and speaking skills.

During mealtime:

- **Give book reports.** Share plots, characters and your opinions about what you're reading.
- **Take turns selecting a topic** to talk about. Or place an interesting object in the center of the table to spark discussion.
- **Turn old maps into placemats.** Refer to the maps when you are talking about places in the news.
- **Play "Did You Know?"** Have each person at the table write three facts on index cards. Take turns drawing and reading the cards. Discuss the information that you learn.



**Q:** I'm looking for some active reading activities for my second grader. He likes to read but won't sit still for very long.

**A:** Don't just read a story with your child—perform it. When you read together, ask your child to impersonate a character from a favorite story as you try to guess who the character is. Then, reverse roles and have him guess who you are impersonating.

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

## Sight words help with reading

Sight words are words that your child sees often and can recognize quickly. The more sight words your child knows, the more time she'll be able to spend learning new words. To build her store of sight words:



- **Read aloud** together every day.
- **Encourage your child** to read alone.
- **Suggest your child** read rhymes and other repetitive materials.

## For lower elementary readers:

- **Just in Case** by Judith Viorst (Atheneum). You never know if a rain-storm will flood the house—so Charlie likes to have backup plans, just in case.
- **See What a Seal Can Do** by Chris Butterworth (Candlewick). Seals may look lazy, but they're very talented animals! Learn about seals and their lives underwater in this beautifully illustrated book.



## For upper elementary readers:

- **Spork** by Kyo Maclear (Kids Can Press). Spork doesn't fit in with either the forks or the spoons in the silverware drawer. What *can* a spork be used for?
- **Esperanza Rising** by Pam Muñoz Ryan (Scholastic). Esperanza lives in a beautiful home with her family. But because of the Great Depression, they move into a camp for migrant workers and into a life that's different from that she has known.

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Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Stacey Marin.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474  
1-800-756-5525, ISSN:1533-3302  
[www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com)