

Building Readers®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Title I Cooperative
Educational Service Unit 10

Fun conversations build reading comprehension

Imagine reading a passage without comprehending what it means. It would feel pointless! That's why it's important to make sure kids understand what they read. To help with this, talk with your child:

- **Before he reads.** Ask questions and build excitement. "Ooooh. That book looks good! What do you think will happen to the dragon on the cover?"
- **While he is reading.** Help your child through challenging words or sections. "The picture has some clues about that paragraph." Or, "Let's find that in the dictionary."
- **After reading.** Review what your child just read. Show that you're interested. "How did the story end?" "What were your favorite parts?"



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Source: Renee Sarnowski, "Tips to Strengthen Reading Comprehension," MSN Encarta, <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/departments/elementary/?article=strengthenreadingcomp>.

*"So please, oh PLEASE, we beg, we pray,
Go throw your TV set away,
And in its place you can install,
A lovely bookshelf on the wall."*

—Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

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. (For example, choose a book, get supplies, write a rough draft, edit, etc.)
2. **Focus.** Use daily to-do lists. Resist distractions and take little breaks when needed. Take pride in persevering!
3. **Finish.** Write the final draft and have a parent read it. Make sure it has your name on it—and that it goes in your backpack to be turned in!

Source: "Help Your Child Get Organized," KidsHealth, http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/learning/child_organized.html.

Parent involvement strongly connected to reading success



Research shows a strong link between parent involvement and kids' reading skills. Some important reading-related activities include:

- **Read stories** with your child.
- **Make reading time** pleasant.
- **Help your child** practice reading and writing.
- **Use unusual words** in conversation with your child, such as *document* or *highlight*.

Source: Margaret Caspe, M. Elena Lopez and Cassandra Wolos, "Family Involvement in Elementary School Children's Education," Harvard Family Research Project, www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/family-involvement-in-elementary-school-children-s-education.

Encourage your child to be a reading 'detective'



When children read, they're like detectives. To get the full story, they must notice details. What do the characters experience with all of their senses? A helpful worksheet is available at <http://learningdisabilities.about.com/library/detaildetective.pdf>.

Offer 'screen time' alternatives



Do you keep track of your child's "screen time"? (This includes TV, movies and video/computer games.)

Monitor how much your child watches each day. If it's more than one or two hours, that's too much. Provide fun alternatives, such as playing with friends, reading and family activities. Set a good example yourself, too.

Use graphic organizers to simplify learning

Many students use “graphic organizers” to structure their thoughts. This is simpler than it sounds. To make a graphic organizer, all your child needs is paper, a pencil and a plan. For example, your child can:

- **Compare two characters** after reading a book. Have your child draw two circles that cross in the middle. Where the circles overlap, he can list their similarities. On the far right or left of each one, he can list the character’s differences.
- **Learn new words.** Have him divide a paper into three columns. Each should have room for something your child needs to remember (such as the word’s spelling, part of speech and definition).

Source: “Graphic Organizers,” Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Company, www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer.

Learn about and support ‘literature circles’

If your child says she enjoys “literature circles” at school, she may like book clubs, too. Literature circles allow children to:

- **Choose** books that interest them.
- **Draw** or taking notes to remember details from the book.
- **Meet** with other kids who want to read.
- **Gather** regularly to discuss reading.
- **Have** relaxed conversations about the material.
- **Lead** the discussion by themselves, without an adult’s help.



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- **Be supervised** (but not “instructed”) by a teacher.
- **Choose** new books to discuss with other kids who are interested.

Source: “What are literature circles?” LiteratureCircles.com, www.literaturecircles.com/article1.htm.



Q: I’m thinking about getting a tutor to help my child with reading. What should I look for in a candidate?

A: Ask your child’s teacher for recommendations. A tutor should:

- **Be well-trained** in effective instruction.
- **Have prior experience** as a reading tutor.
- **Have strong references** from previous clients.
- **Establish a rapport** so that your child wants to read more.

Source: Susan Hall, Ed. D., “Finding a Good Reading Tutor,” [GreatSchools](http://GreatSchools.com), www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/2362.

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



For lower elementary readers:

Eats, Shoots & Leaves by Lynne Truss (Putnam). Learning grammar is fun—and laugh-out-loud funny—in this book based on an adult bestseller.

Pete & Pickles by Berkeley Breathed (Philomel). A practical pig named Pete meets a runaway circus elephant named Pickles. Their fun adventures were inspired by a drawing created by the author’s daughter!

For upper elementary readers:

The Grapes of Math by Greg Tang (Scholastic). This colorful book simplifies math in appealing ways. After reading it, kids may find problems easier—and faster—to solve.

Poetry for Young People: Robert Frost, edited by Gary D. Schmidt (Sterling). This collection of Robert Frost poems includes discussion and illustrations. It’s great for poetry fans—and it creates new ones, too.

Learn how to ‘attack’ words



You may hear your child’s teacher mention “word attack” or “decoding” skills. These terms refer to the ability to figure out words. To help your child build these skills, cover a word’s beginning or end. For example, your child might know *do* and *cry* but be confused by *redo* and *crying*. Have her read the small word. Then try the big one again.

Source: “Helping The School-Age Child Become A Better Reader,” Children’s Literacy Publications, www.makereadingfirst.com/struggle.html.

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How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Managing Editor: Pat Hodgdon.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern. Writer: Susan O’Brien.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
1-800-756-5525, ISSN: 1533-3302
www.parent-institute.com