

# BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Great Falls Elementary School  
Learning Lab

## Summer reading programs can give your child's reading skills a boost

Have you looked into your library's summer reading program yet? In addition to being fun, these programs can help your child keep her reading skills sharp over the summer months. Typically, they also:

- **Offer exciting activities.** For example, kids may do art projects, form book clubs and meet authors.
- **Encourage the enjoyment** of all kinds of materials—from magazines to graphic novels and audiobooks.
- **Provide motivation** in a safe environment. Library events are wonderful opportunities to socialize with other readers, too.
- **Build good habits**, such as visiting the library often. And once a child enjoys summer reading events, she may want to come back all year long.



### Promote reading with irresistible books

Summer is a great time for you and your child to read the same book—and have fun discussing it, too. But if you're worried that he will reject this idea, prepare in advance.

Let your child pick what you'll read from books with enticing elements, such as:

- **Humor.** Young readers giggle at pictures and wordplay. Older kids understand jokes that play out through dialogue and scenes.
- **Personality.** Look for main characters who are similar to your child in feelings and experiences.
- **Excitement.** Reluctant readers like short chapters with lots of action. Even the first paragraph should be fascinating!
- **Originality.** Sometimes a book's cover or illustrations can draw readers in. Stand-out topics (like "Gross bugs!") attract readers, too.

## Read to stop the 'summer slide'

Studies have shown that children who read four to six books over the summer tend to avoid the "summer slide"—the loss of academic skills kids experience when they're not in school.



Encourage your child to read this summer, but don't make it seem like an assignment. Say, "It's summer, and you get to read what you choose! I'll even let you stay up late if a book is so good you can't put it down."

### Pets make great listeners

If your child struggles with reading, he may feel self-conscious reading aloud. But it's important for him to practice so he can improve. A family pet can be a nonjudgmental audience that will make your child feel more at ease reading aloud. If you don't have a pet, encourage him to read to a stuffed animal instead!



## Your child can organize thoughts with a KWL chart

Before your child begins a reading assignment for school, encourage her to make a KWL chart. Divide a piece of paper into three columns, and then have her write what she:

- **Knows.** She should briefly preview the material. What does she already know about the topic?
- **Wants to know.** What questions does she have?
- **Learned.** When she finishes reading, have her jot down what she learned.



## Expand thinking with Alphabet Words

Alphabet Words is an engaging game that can help your child build cognitive skills. To play:

1. **Create the game board.** Have your child draw a line down the center of a sheet of paper and write the letters A through M down the left side, and N through Z down the right.
2. **Pick a theme,** such as *food* or *animals*.
3. **Have your child write one word** next to each letter on the game board. Each word must match the theme and begin with that letter—*apple* for A, *bagel* for B, etc.
4. **Give your child hints** for possible words if she gets stuck. For the letter *I*, you might say, “I’m thinking of something sweet that is on a cake (*icing*).”
5. **Tally up the number of words** your child has on the game board. Can she beat her score next time you play?



## Start planning now for summer reading

Develop a summer reading plan to keep your child engaged in reading. Here are a few ideas to help you get started:

- **Stock your home** with a variety of reading materials linked to your child’s interests. Ask the librarian for recommendations.
- **Make a list of new places** for your child to read—at the park, in the bathtub, at his brother’s soccer game.
- **Combine reading and food.** Plan to serve a meal related to the theme of a book. Or, go on a reading picnic.
- **Involve your child’s friends.** Help him plan a reading party or a book swap.



**Q:** I want to help my child think about what she reads. How can I do this?

**A:** Helping your child think about reading materials helps her understand them. Try asking her questions such as, “What happened in the beginning of the story? The middle? The end?” “Why do you think the author wrote this book?” “What did you like or dislike about it and why?” “Can you teach me something you learned from the book?”

## Erase reading excuses

- **“I don’t have time.”** Rearrange your child’s schedule to include time for reading.
- **“It’s too hard.”** Ask the teacher to help you find books written at your child’s reading level.
- **“It’s no fun.”** Extend your child’s positive reading experiences. For example, if he enjoyed a book about dinosaurs, follow up with a visit to a museum.

## For lower elementary readers:

- **Jasper John Dooley: Star of the Week** by Caroline Adderson. It’s Jasper’s week to shine—but nothing is going according to plan. Will he be able to get back on track with the help of his family and friends?
- **Waiting Is Not Easy** by Mo Willems. Piggie tells Gerald he has a big, special surprise for them to share—and Gerald just cannot wait!



## For upper elementary readers:

- **Fortunately, the Milk** by Neil Gaiman. A quick errand to get milk turns into an unforgettable adventure filled with aliens, time travel and more!
- **Pie** by Sarah Weeks. Alice’s aunt died and left a secret (and popular) pie crust recipe to her cat. She also left her cat to Alice. Now the town is going pie crazy!

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