

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Great Falls Elementary School
Learning Lab

Show your child strategies for reading different types of material

Reading a novel in language arts and reading a science textbook require different skills. When your child is reading to learn in a subject such as math, social studies or science, suggest that she use these strategies:

- **Before reading.** Even before she opens the book, have your child think about what she already knows about the topic. She can jot down a few notes to get her mind going.
- **During reading.** Your child should highlight, underline or write down important information. Have her write down questions she has about what she is reading.
- **After reading.** Encourage your child to summarize what she has read. If she is confused about something, have her go back and reread that section. Then, she can try to connect what she's read to something she already knows.



Thanksgiving offers literacy opportunities

Holidays can bring more than big meals and football games on TV. They can also offer you and your child a great chance to work on literacy skills together. You can:

- **Work on writing.** In the U.S., the pilgrims observed the first Thanksgiving because they were thankful for their survival in a new land. Have your child write a list of things for which he is thankful. Post the list.
- **Read the poem** "Over the River and Through the Woods" by Lydia Maria Child with your child. It tells the story of a Thanksgiving long ago. As a family, write a story or poem about your own holiday traditions.
- **Set aside some extra time** for reading aloud. Consider delaying bedtime over the holiday to allow for a longer reading time.

Venn diagrams help your child make comparisons

Venn diagrams are graphic organizers that your child can use to clarify the similarities and differences she comes across while reading. All she needs is a pencil and paper. Then she should:

1. **Draw** two overlapping circles.
2. **Write** the similarities between the objects she's comparing (such as two characters) in the overlapping section.
3. **Write** the differences in the sections that do not overlap.



Try biographical nonfiction

Many kids stick with fiction when choosing books at the library. But don't overlook biographies and autobiographies! They're exciting because the stories are true. Explain that to your child. Then ask, "Who would you like to learn about?" Look for books about that person's life.



Language skills improve reading

Oral language, which is made up of speaking and listening, is a vital part of your child's literacy development. Strong oral language skills go hand-in-hand with well-developed reading skills.

To hone your child's oral language skills:

- **Build** her vocabulary.
- **Model** correct grammar.
- **Ask** questions and converse daily.



Build your child's vocabulary by teaching new words naturally

You're reading a book aloud and you come to a word your child doesn't know. Should you stop, look up the word and give your child the definition? Experts say parents should try to explain the word naturally. For example:

- **Provide an easy-to-understand definition.** "Asphalt is the black stuff used to make roads."
- **Give an example of how the word is used.** "The driveway at our house is made of asphalt."
- **Suggest that your child use the word.** "I bet you can make up a sentence that includes asphalt. Go for it!"
- **Use the word repeatedly.** Over the next week and more, make a point of using the new word in conversation.



Ask questions to get your child thinking

When you get your child to talk about what he's reading, it boosts his memory, critical thinking and comprehension. Ask him the following questions:

- **Why did you select** this book?
- **What is it about?**
- **Where does the story** take place?
- **Who is your favorite** character?
- **What is the most interesting** part of the book to you?
- **What main idea** do you think the author was trying to get across?
- **What conflict** is important to the story?
- **Did you like** how the story ended? How would you have written it differently?
- **Does the story** remind you of other books you've read?



Q: My child picks books that are too challenging. Then she gives up after one chapter. How can I help her make better choices?

A: Choose a few books that match her reading level. (She should be able to read a full page without struggling with more than about five words.) Then,

let her pick from your selection of books. If she needs an extra boost to keep going, read part of it aloud. Consider taking turns reading to each other.

Simplify long pages of reading

Textbooks require lots of reading. If your child is intimidated by seeing many words on one page, have him use a sheet of paper to cover part of the page. This way, he'll focus on one paragraph at a time. As he reads down the page, he can move the paper down to uncover more paragraphs.



For lower elementary readers:

- ***Are You Awake?*** by Sophie Blackall. Edward isn't ready to sleep. He's curious about a lot of things! Despite his mom's answers, the questions keep coming.

- ***Flight of the Honey Bee*** by Raymond Huber. Follow Scout, a honey bee, on her journey to find a flower full of nectar. This book includes many fascinating facts about honey bees.



For upper elementary readers:

- ***I Am Jack*** by Susanne Gervay. After Jack is bullied at school, he'd rather be anywhere else but there. With the support of his family, he finds a way to prevail.
- ***Happy Happy Clover*** by Sayuri Tatsuyama. This story about a bunny's adventures is told in comic-book style, which may appeal to reluctant readers.

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