

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Great Falls Elementary School
Learning Lab

Make reading routines part of your child's back-to-school success plan!

The beginning of a new school year is a time to gather supplies and get organized. It's also a time to establish routines that help students do their best—especially when it comes to reading.

To help your child develop strong reading habits:

- **Set aside time for daily reading.** Kids who read at least 20 minutes a day (in addition to their regular homework reading) are more successful in school and develop larger vocabularies.
- **Make your routine special.** Read favorite books at the breakfast table. Visit the library every week and fill a bag with new books to read. Do whatever it takes to keep your child excited about reading!
- **Stick to a regular bedtime reading routine.** Allow time for getting ready for bed, reading a bedtime story and saying good night.



Talk about prefixes and suffixes to expand your child's vocabulary

Learning about prefixes and suffixes can help children comprehend new words in almost every subject. Remind your child that:

- **Prefixes appear at the beginning of words.** For example, the prefix *pre-* means “before.”
- **Suffixes are found at the end of words.** Words that end in *-able*, for instance, relate to “being able.”
- **Prefixes and suffixes are clues.** They can help students figure out the meaning of new words. For example, the word *predetermine* means “to determine before.” *Measurable* means “able to be measured.”

Together, have some fun with prefixes and suffixes. Can your child guess the meaning of *predate* or *excusable*? Can he name words with prefixes and suffixes for you to define?

Set limits on screen time

Too much recreational screen time is linked to problems with sleep, learning and socializing. So, if you relaxed screen-time rules over the summer, it's time to get back on track.

Experts recommend that parents:

- **Establish screen-free times**, such as during meals.
- **Set a technology curfew.** Make sure your child turns off screens at least one hour before bedtime.
- **Offer fun alternatives.** Suggest your child read, play outside or do a craft.



Retell fairy tales in unusual ways

Read a favorite fairy tale together. Then, ask your child to change the characters and details to create a new version of the story. For example, how would *The Three Little Pigs* differ if told from the wolf's perspective?



Help your child read fluently

Fluency is the ability to read smoothly, accurately and with expression. To improve your child's fluency:

- **Encourage her to listen** to an audio recording of a book while she follows along.
- **Reread favorite books.** Repetition of familiar books improves fluency.
- **Remind your child** to pause between sentences.



Share tips for writing assignments

Reading and writing are closely-related skills. But even great readers sometimes have a tough time with writing assignments. Good writing involves everything from understanding a subject to organizing thoughts, and checking spelling and punctuation.

When your child has a writing assignment:

1. **Have him talk through some ideas** before starting to write. Clear writing starts with clear thinking.
2. **Encourage him to take notes** or make an outline before writing.
3. **Offer positive feedback.** Be specific. Say, "I really like the way you've described what led up to this event."
4. **Don't criticize.** If your child thinks you always look for what's wrong, he won't want to share his writing with you.
5. **Remind him to edit his work.** He should check for any spelling, punctuation or grammar mistakes.
6. **Be patient.** Good writing takes time!



Preview textbooks with your child

It's exciting when your child gets her very first school textbook. When she brings the book home, preview it together:



- **Look for the author's name** and the date of publication.
- **Read over** the table of contents.
- **See which chapters** look most interesting.
- **Look at pictures,** graphs, maps and other illustrations.

For lower elementary readers:

- *The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist* by Cynthia Levinson. This moving story will teach children that they are never too young to make a difference!

- *My Kite Is Stuck! And Other Stories* by Salina Yoon. Vibrant illustrations and repetition make these silly stories about three friends a fun experience for early readers.



For upper elementary readers:

- *Bugs: A Stunning Pop-Up Look at Insects, Spiders and Other Creepy-Crawlies* by George McGavin. Learn about bugs' growth cycles and more in this pop-up book.
- *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* by Kathi Appelt. Follow two raccoon brothers on their mission to save Sugar Man Swamp.

Make reading aloud a special family time

Reading aloud as a family can strengthen your child's vocabulary, improve reading scores—and allow everyone to enjoy books and reading together.

For successful read-alouds:

- **Read the book** yourself before you read it aloud. You'll be more comfortable reading it aloud if you're familiar with the text.
- **Read books everyone enjoys.** Your enthusiasm will show on your face and in your voice if you like the book.
- **Leave them wanting more.** Stop reading when the story becomes exciting and your child can't wait to hear what will happen next.



Q: My child's teacher wants students to "think critically" about what they read at home. How can I help?

A: All elementary students—even kindergartners—can practice critical thinking. After your child reads something, ask questions that help her analyze information. For example, "What happened in the story?" "Why did it have a happy ending?" "Does the book remind you of anything in real life?" "What did you learn from reading it?"

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