Help Your Child Learn To Read

Complete with activities for children from infancy through age 10

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Foreword

"Why?"

This is the question we parents are always trying to answer. It's good that children ask questions: that's the best way to learn. All children have two wonderful resources for learning--imagination and curiosity. As a parent, you can awaken your children to the joy of learning by encouraging their imagination and curiosity.

Helping Your Child Learn To Read is one in a series of books on different education topics intended to help you make the most of your child's natural curiosity. Teaching and learning are not mysteries that can only happen in school. They also happen when parents and children do simple things together.

For instance, you and your child can: sort the socks on laundry day-sorting is a major function in math and science; cook a meal together-cooking involves not only math and science but good health as well; tell and read each other stories--storytelling is the basis for reading and writing (and a story about the past is also history); or play a game of hopscotch together playing physical games will help your child learn to count and start on a road to lifelong fitness.

By doing things together, you will show that learning is fun and important. You will be encouraging your child to study, learn, and stay in school.

All of the books in this series tie in with the National Education Goals set by the President and the Governors, The goals state that, by the year 2000: every child will start school ready to learn; at least 90 percent of all students will graduate from high school; each American student will leave the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades demonstrating competence in core subjects; U.S. students will be first in the world in math and science achievement; every American adult will be literate, will have the skills necessary to compete in a global economy, and will be able to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and American schools will be liberated from drugs and violence so they can focus on learning.

This book is a way for you to help meet these goals. It will give you a short rundown on facts, but the biggest part of the book is made up of simple, fun activities for you and your child to do together. Your child may even beg you to do them. At the end of the book is a list of resources, so you can continue the fun.

Let's get started. We invite you to find an activity in this book and try it.

Introduction

When parents help their children lean to read, they help open the door to a new world. As a parent, you can begin an endless learning chain: You read to your children, they develop a love of stories and poems, they want to read on their own, they practice reading, and finally they read for their own information or pleasure. They become readers, and their world is forever expanded and enriched.

This book focuses primarily on what you can do to help children up to 10 years of age. During these years you can lay the foundation for your child to become a lifelong reader. In the first section, you will find some basic information about reading to your child. This is followed by suggestions that guide you to:

Read with your child and make this all-important time together enjoyable;

Stimulate your child's interest in reading and language; and

Learn about your child's school reading programs and find ways to help.

While most of the book is for parents of children up to 10 years of age, there is a brief section for parents of older children on how to help them continue to grow as readers.

Finally, there is a resource section. As you make reading with your child a routine part of your lives, this section will help you to find new ideas and a variety of books you both might like.

You don't need to be an especially skillful reader yourself to help your child. In fact, some public libraries offer adult literacy programs that involve reading to children as a way to improve literacy skills for the whole family. Nor do you have to devote great amounts of time to reading with your child. It's the quality of time that counts. Just be consistent--give as much time as you can each day to help your child. The activities suggested are designed to fit into busy schedules.

Helping your child become a reader is an adventure you will not want to miss. The benefits to your child are immeasurable, and in the process you will find your world becoming richer as well.

The Basics

There is no more important activity for preparing your child to succeed as a reader than reading aloud together. Fill your story times with a variety of books. Be consistent, be patient, and watch the magic work.

Start Young and Stay with It

At just a few months of age, an infant can look at pictures, listen to your voice, and point to objects on cardboard pages. Guide your child by pointing to the pictures, and say the names of the various objects. By drawing attention to pictures and associating the words with both pictures and the real-world objects, your child will learn the importance of language.

Children learn to love the sound of language before they even notice the existence of printed words on a page. Reading books aloud to children stimulates their imagination and expands their understanding of the world. It helps them develop language and listening skills and prepares them to understand the written word. When the rhythm and melody of language become a part of a child's life, learning to read will be as natural as learning to walk and talk.

Even after children lean to read by themselves, it's still important for you to read aloud together. By reading stories that are on their interest level, but beyond their reading level, you can stretch young readers' understanding and motivate them to improve their skills.

Advertise the Joy of Reading!

Our goal is to motivate children to want to read so they will practice reading independently and, thus, become fluent readers. That happens when children enjoy reading. We parents can do for reading what fast food chains do for hamburgers... ADVERTISE! And we advertise by reading great stories and poems to children.

We can help our children find the tools they need to succeed in life. Having access to information through the printed word is an absolute necessity. Knowledge is power, and books are full of it. But reading is more than just a practical tool. Through books we can enrich our minds; we can also relax and enjoy some precious leisure moments.

With your help, your children can begin a lifelong relationship with the printed word, so they grow into adults who read easily and frequently whether for business, knowledge, or pleasure.

Remember When You Were Very Young

Between the ages of 4 and 7, many children begin to recognize words on a page. In our society this may begin with recognition of a logo for a fast food chain or the brand name of a favorite cereal. But, before long, that special moment when a child holds a book and starts to decode the mystery of written words is likely to occur.

You can help remove part of the mystery without worrying about a lot of theory. Just read the stories and poems and let them work their wonders. There is no better way to prepare your child for that moment when reading starts to "click," even if it's years down the road.

It will help, however, if we open our eyes to some things adult readers tend to take for granted. It's easier to be patient when we remember how much children do not know. Here are a few concepts we adults know so well we forget sometimes we ever learned them.

There's a difference between words and pictures. Point to the print as you read aloud.

Words on a page have meaning, and that is what we learn to read.

Words go across the page from left to right. Follow with your finger as you read.

Words on a page are made up of letters and are separated by a space.

Each letter has at least two forms: one for capital letters and one for small letters.

These are examples of symbols.

Imagine how you would feel if you were trying to interpret a book full of such symbols. That's how young readers feel. But, a little patience (maybe by turning it into a puzzle you can solve together) is certain to build confidence.

Home Is Where the Heart Is

It's no secret that activities at home are an important supplement to the classroom, but there's more to it than that. There are things that parents can give children at home that the classrooms cannot give.

Children who are read to, grow up to love books. Over the years, these children will have good memories to treasure. They remember stories that made them laugh and stories that

made them cry. They remember sharing these times with someone they love, and they anticipate with joy the time when they will be able to read for themselves.

By reading aloud together, by being examples, and by doing other activities, parents are in a unique position to help children enjoy reading and see the value of it.

Important Things To Know

It is important to keep fun in your parent-child reading and to let joy set the tone and pace. Here is a story to keep in mind.

Shamu is a performing whale, to the delight of many. However, she sometimes gets distracted and refuses to do her tricks. When that happens, her trainers stand around in dripping wetsuits and wait for her stubbornness to pass. They know that when a 5,000-pound whale decides she doesn't want to flip her tail on cue, there is very little anyone can do about it. But whales like to play, and sooner or later Shamu returns to the game of performing for her audience. Shamu's trainers know this so they're always patient, they're always confident, and they always make performing fun.

While helping your child become a reader is certainly different from training a whale, the same qualities of patience, confidence, and playfulness in your approach will get results. If, from time to time, your child gets distracted and loses interest, take a break. Children love to learn. Give them a little breathing room, and their interest will always be renewed.

It's Part of Life

Although the life of a parent is often hectic, you should try to read with your child at least once a day at a regularly scheduled time. But don't be discouraged if you skip a day or don't always keep to your schedule. Just read to your child as often as you possibly can.

If you have more than one child, try to spend some time reading alone with each child, especially if they're more than 2 years apart. However, it's also fine to read to children at different stages and ages at the same time. Most children enjoy listening to many types of stories. When stories are complex, children can still get the idea and can be encouraged to ask questions. When stories are easy or familiar, youngsters enjoy these "old friends" and may even help in the reading. Taking the time to read with your children on a regular basis sends an important message: Reading is worthwhile.

One More Time

You may go through a period when your child favors one book and wants it read night after night. It is not unusual for children to favor a particular story, and this can be boring for parents. Keep in mind, however, that a favorite story may speak to your child's interests or emotional needs. Be patient. Continue to expose your children to a wealth of books and eventually they will be ready for more stories.

Talking about Stories

It's often a good idea to talk about a story you are reading, but you need not feel compelled to talk about every story. Good stories will encourage a love for reading, with or without conversation. And sometimes children need time to think about stories they have read. A day or so later, don't be surprised if your child mentions something from a story you've read together.

The More the Merrier

From time to time, invite other adults or older children to listen in or join in reading aloud. The message is: Reading is for everybody.

How Do I Use This Book?

There are two types of activities in this book to help:

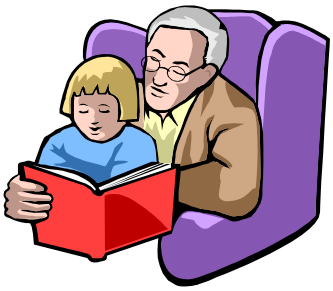
Make reading with your child enjoyable and

Increase writing, talking, and listening to boost your child's love of language.

Most of the activities are for children who range in age from 3 to 10 years, with a few for babies.

Enjoyment is essential in the process of helping your child become a reader. All of the activities are written with this thought in mind. So, if you and your child don't enjoy one activity, move on to something else and try it again later.

Read Along



The following is intended to help you become a parent who is great at reading with your child. You'll find ideas and activities to enrich this precious time together.

Children become readers when their parents read to them. It really is as simple as that. And here's the good news: It's easy to do and it's great fun. With a little practice you will be making the memories of a lifetime, memories both you and your child will cherish.

It is best to read to your child early and often. But it's never too late to begin. Start today. Although the activities in this section are designed to enhance reading aloud with preschoolers and beginning readers, a child is never too old to be read to.

With youngsters, remember that reading is a physical act, as well as a mental one. It involves hand-eye coordination. So, when you read, involve your child by:

Pointing out objects in the pictures;

Following the words with your finger (so your child develops a sense that the words go from left to fight on the page); and

Having your child help turn the pages (to lean that the pages turn from fight to left).

Activities

Look for Books
Books and Babies
R and R: Repetition and Rhyme
Poetry in Motion
Read to Me
Family Reading Time
Story Talk

Look for Books

The main thing is to find books you both love. They will shape your child's first impression of the world of reading.

What to do

1. Ask friends, neighbors, and teachers to share the names of their favorite books.

2. Visit your local public library, and as early as possible, get your child a library card. Ask the librarian for help in selecting books. (Also see the resources section at the end of this book.)

3. Look for award-winning books. Each year the American Library Association selects children's books for the Caldecott Medal for illustration and the Newbery Medal for writing.

4. Check the book review sections of newspapers and magazines for recommended new children's books.

5. As soon as they're old enough, have your children join you in browsing for books and making selections.

6. If you and your child don't enjoy reading a particular book, put it aside and pick up another one.

Keep in mind your child's reading level and listening level are different. When you read easy books, beginning readers will soon be reading along with you. When you read more advanced books, you instill a love of stories, and you build motivation that transforms children into lifelong readers.

Books and Babies

Babies love to listen to the human voice. What better way than through reading!

What you'll need

Some baby books (books made of cardboard or cloth with flaps to lift and holes to peek through)

What to do

1. Start out by singing lullabies and folk songs to your baby. At around 6 months, look for books with brightly colored, simple pictures and lots of rhythm. (Mother Goose is

perfect.) At around 9 months, include books that feature pictures and names of familiar objects.

2. As you read, point out objects in the pictures and make sure your baby sees all the things that are fun to do with books. (Pat the Bunny by Dorothy Kunhardt is a classic touch-and-feel book for babies.)

3. Vary the tone of your voice, sing nursery rhymes, bounce your knee, make funny faces, do whatever special effects you can to stimulate your baby's interest.

4. Allow your child to touch and hold cloth and sturdy cardboard books.

5. When reading to a baby, be brief but read often.

As you read to your baby, your child is forming an association between books and what is most loved; your voice and closeness. Allowing babies to handle books deepens their attachment even more.

R and R: Repetition and Rhyme

Repetition makes books predictable, and young readers love knowing what comes next.

What you'll need

Books with repeated phrases*
Short rhyming poems

A few favorites are: Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible. No Good , Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst; Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin, Jr.; Horton Hatches the Egg by Dr. Seuss; and The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper. There are many good booklists that highlight those books with repetitive refrains. (See the resources section.)

What to do

1. Pick a story with repeated phrases or a poem you and your child like.

2. For example, read:

   Wolf Voice: Little pig, little pig, Let me come in.

   Little Pig: Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin.

   Wolf Voice: Then I'll huff and I'll puff, And I'll blow your house in!

After the wolf has blown down the first pig's house, your child will soon join in with the refrain.

3. Read slowly, and with a smile or a nod, let your children know you appreciate their participation.

4. As children grow more familiar with the story, pause and give them the chance to "fill in the blanks."

5. Encourage your children to pretend to read, especially books that contain repetition and rhyme. Most children who enjoy reading will eventually memorize all or parts of a book and imitate your reading.

When youngsters anticipate what's coming next in a story or poem, they have a sense of mastery over books. When children feel power, they have the courage to try. Pretending to read is an important step in the process of learning to read.

Poetry in Motion

When children act out a good poem, they love its rhyme, rhythm, and the pictures it paints with a few well-chosen words. They grow as readers by connecting emotion with the written word.

What you'll need

Poems that rhyme, tell a story, and are written from a child's point of view

What to do

1. Read a poem slowly to your child, and bring all your dramatic talents to the reading. (In other words, ham it up.)

2. If there is a poem your child is particularly fond of, suggest acting out a favorite line. Be sure to award such efforts with delighted enthusiasm.

3. Then suggest acting out a verse, a stanza, or the entire poem. Ask your child to make a face of the way the character in the poem is feeling. Remember that facial expressions bring emotion into the performer's voice.

4. Again, be an enthusiastic audience for your child. Applause is always nice.

5. If your child is comfortable with the idea, look for a larger setting with an attentive, appreciative audience. Perhaps an after-dinner "recital" for family members would appeal to your child.

6. Mistakes are a fact of life, so ignore them.

Poems are often short with lots of white space on the page. This makes them manageable for new readers and helps to build their confidence.

Read to Me

It's important to read to your children, but equally important to listen to them read to you. Children thrive on having someone appreciate their developing skills.

What you'll need

Books at your child's reading level

What to do

1. Listen attentively as your child reads.

2. Take turns. You read a paragraph and have your child read the next one. As your child becomes more at ease with reading aloud, take turns reading a full page. Keep in mind that your child may be focusing on how to read, and your reading helps to keep the story alive.

3. If your children have trouble reading words, you can help in several ways.

   Tell them to skip over the word, read the rest of the sentence, and ask what word would make sense in the story.

   Help them use what they know about letters and sounds.

   Supply the correct word.

4. Tell children how proud you are of their efforts and skills.

Listening to your children read aloud provides opportunities for you to express appreciation of their new skills and for them to practice their reading. Most importantly, it's another way to enjoy reading together.

Family Reading Time

A quiet time for family members to read on their own may be the only chance busy parents get to read the paper.

What you'll need

Your own reading materials
Reading materials for your children

What to do

1. Both you and your child should pick out something to read.

2. Don't be concerned if your beginning readers pick materials that are easier than their school reading books. Practice with easy books (and the comics) will improve their fluency.

3. If you subscribe to a children's magazine, this is a good time to get it out. There are many good children's magazines, and youngsters often get a special thrill out of receiving their own mail.

4. Relax and enjoy while you each read your own selections.

A family reading time shows that you like to read. Because you value reading, your children will too.

Story Talk

Talking about what you read is another way to help children develop language and thinking skills. You don't need to plan the talk, discuss every story, or expect an answer.

What you'll need

Reading materials

What to do

1. Read slowly and pause occasionally to think out loud about a story. You can speculate: "I wonder what's going to happen next!" Or ask a question: "Do you know what a palace is?" Or point out: "Look where the little mouse is now."

2. Answer your children's questions, and if you think they don't understand something, stop and ask them. Don't worry if you break into the flow of a story to make something clear.

3. Read the name of the book's author and illustrator and make sure your children understand what they do.

Talking about stories they read helps children develop their vocabularies, link stories to everyday life, and use what they know about the world to make sense out of stories.

Write and Talk, Too

While reading with your child is most important, there are other activities that help to get children ready to read. With a solid foundation, your child will not only read, but will read with enthusiasm.

Learning to read is part of learning language. It's like a little leaguer leaning to hit a baseball. The young hitter must learn to watch the ball when it is pitched, to step into it, and to swing the bat to make the hit. It's a single event made up of three acts. Baseball players learn to do all three at once.

The same is true of learning language. When we use language, we speak words out loud, we read words on paper, and we write. This section has activities that encourage your child to

Speak Read Write Listen

Begin long before you expect your child actually to read, and continue long after your child is an independent reader.

Activities

Tot Talk
What's in a Name?
World of Words
Book Notes
Family Stories
Now Hear This
P.S. I Love You
Easy as Pie
Write On
TV
Make a Book
Make Your Own Dictionary

Tot Talk

What's "old hat" to you can be new and exciting to preschoolers. When you talk about everyday experiences, you help children connect their world to language and enable them to go beyond that world to new ideas.

What to do

1. As you get dinner ready, talk to your child about things that are happening. When your 2- or 3-year-old "helps" by taking out all the pots and pans, talk about them. Which one is the biggest? Can you find a lid for that one? What color is this one?

2. When walking down the street and your toddler stops to collect leaves, stop and ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Which leaves are the same? Which are different? What else grows on trees?

3. Ask "what if" questions. What would happen if we didn't shovel the snow? What if that butterfly lands on your nose?

4. Answer your children's endless "why" questions patiently. When you say, "I don't know, let's look it up," you show how important books are as resources for answering questions.

5. After your preschooler tells you a story, ask questions so you can understand better. That way children learn how to tell complete stories and know you are interested in what they have to say.

6. Expose your children to varied experiences--trips to the library, museum, or zoo; walks in the park; or visits with friends and relatives. Surround these events with lots of comments, questions, and answers.

Talking enables children to expand their vocabulary and understanding of the world. The ability to carry on a conversation is important for reading development. Remember, it is better to talk too much than too little with a small child.

What's in a Name?

Use your child's name to develop an interest in the world of print.

What you'll need

Paper
Pencil, crayon, or marker

What to do

1. Print the letters of your child's name on paper.

2. Say each letter as you write it, "K...A...T...I...E"

3. When you finish, say, "That's your name!"

4. Have your child draw a picture.

5. When finished, say, "I have an idea! Let's put your name on your picture." As you write the letters, say them out loud.

6. If you have magnetic letters, spell out your child's name on the refrigerator door.

7. Print your child's name on a card, and put it on the door of your child's room or special place.

It's hard to overemphasize the importance of writing and displaying your child's name.

World of Words

Here are a few ways to create a home rich in words.

What you'll need

Paper
Pencils, crayons, markers
Glue (if you want to make a poster)
Newspapers, magazines
Safety scissors

What to do

1. Hang posters of the alphabet on bedroom walls or make an alphabet poster with your child.

2. Label the things in your child's pictures. If your child draws a picture of a house, label it "house" and put it on the refrigerator.

3. Have your child watch you write when you make shopping or to-do lists. Say the words out loud and carefully print each letter.

4. Let your child make lists, too. Help your child form the letters and spell the words.

5. Look at newspapers and magazines with your child. Find an interesting picture and show it to your child as you read the caption out loud.

6. Create a scrapbook. Cut out pictures of people and places and label them.

By exposing your child to words and letters often, your child will begin to recognize the shapes of letters. The world of words will become friendly.

Book Notes

With very little effort, parents can introduce children to the wide world of books.

What to do

1. Visit the library. Get a library card in your child's name and one for yourself if you don't have one. Go to the children's section and spend time reading and selecting books to take home. Check out books yourself to show your child everyone can use and enjoy books and the library. Be sure to introduce your child to the librarian and ask about special programs the library has for children.

2. Start your own home library. Designate a bookcase or shelf especially for your child. Encourage your child to arrange the books by some method--books about animals, holiday books, favorite books.

3. Keep an eye out for inexpensive books at flea markets, garage sales, used book stores, and discount tables at bookstores. Many public libraries sell old books once a year. You will find some real bargains!

4. Make your own books. (See activity on page 46.) Child-made books become lasting treasures and part of your home library.

When collecting books is an important family activity, parent send the message that books are important and fun.

Family Stories

Family stories enrich the relationship between parent and child.

What to do

1. Tell your child stories about your parents and grandparents. You might even put these stories in a book and add old family photographs.

2. Have your child tell you stories about what happened on special days, such as holidays, birthdays, and family vacations.

3. Reminisce about when you were little. Describe things that happened at school involving teachers and subjects you were studying. Talk about your brothers, sisters, or friends.

4. Write a trip journal with your child to create a new family story. Recording the day's special event and pasting the photograph into the journal ties the family story to a written record. You can also include everyday trips like going to the market or the park.

It helps for children to know that stories come from real people and are about real events. When children listen to stories, they hear the voice of the storyteller. This helps them hear the words when they learn to read aloud or read silently.

Now Hear This

Children are great mimics. When you tell stories, your child will begin to tell stories, too.

What to do

1. Have your child tell stories like those you have told. Ask: "And then what happened?" to urge the story along.

2. Listen closely when your child speaks. Be enthusiastic and responsive.

3. If you don't understand some part of the story, take the time to get your child to explain. This will help your child understand the relationship between a speaker and a listener and an author and a reader.

4. Encourage your child to express him or herself. This will help your child develop a wide vocabulary. It can also help with pronouncing words clearly.

Having a good audience is very helpful for a child to improve language skills, as well as poise in speaking. Parents can be the best audience a child will ever have.

P.S. I Love You

Something important happens when children receive and write letters. They realize that the printed word has a purpose.

What you'll need

Paper
Pencil, crayon, or marker

What to do

1. Send your child little notes (by putting them in a pocket or lunch box, for example). When your child shows you the note, read it out loud with expression. Some children will read the notes on their own.

2. When your child expresses a feeling or thought that's related to a person, have your child write a letter. Have your child dictate the words to you if your child doesn't write yet.

For example:

Dear Grandma,

I like it when you make ice cream. It's better than the kind we buy at the store.

Your grandson,

Darryl

P.S. I love you.

3. Ask the people who receive these notes to respond. An oral response is fine--a written response is even better.

4. Explain the writing process to your child: "We think of ideas and put them into words; we put the words on paper; people read the words; and people respond."

Language is speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Each element supports and enriches the other. Sending letters will help children become writers, and writing will make them better readers.

Easy as Pie

Preparing meals is another good way for children to practice language skills.

What you'll need

Paper
Pencil
Cookbook or recipes
Food supplies

What to do

1. Ask children to help you prepare a grocery list.

2. Take them to the market and have them find items on the list.

3. Have them help put away the groceries and encourage them to read the labels, box tops, and packages as they store them.

4. Have them read the ingredients from a recipe.

5. Prepare a meal together and let them take needed items from shelves and storage areas.

6. Talk about the steps in preparing a meal--first, second, and so on.

7. Praise the efforts of your early reader and encourage other family members to do the same.

The purpose of reading is to get meaning from the page. By using reading skills to prepare a meal, children see positive results from reading.

Write On

Writing helps a child become a better reader, and reading helps a child become a better writer.

What you'll need

Pencils, crayons, or markers
Paper or notebook
Chalkboard

What to do

1. Ask your preschooler to dictate a story to you. It could include descriptions of your outings and activities, along with mementos such as fall leaves, birthday cards, and photographs. Older children can do these activities on their own.

2. Use a chalkboard or a family message board as an exciting way to involve children in writing with a purpose.

3. Keep supplies of paper, pencils, markers, and the like within easy reach.

4. Encourage beginning and developing writers to keep journals and write stories. Ask questions that will help children organize the stories, and respond to their questions

about letters and spelling. Suggest they share the activity with a smaller brother, sister, or friend.

5. Respond to the content of children's writing, and don't be overly concerned with misspellings. Over time you can help your child concentrate on learning to spell correctly.

When the children begin to write, they run the risk criticism, and it takes courage to continue. Our job as parents is to help children find the courage. This we can do by expressing our appreciation of their efforts.

TV

Television can be a great tool for education too. The keys are setting limits, making good choices, taking time to watch together, discussing what you view, and encouraging follow-up reading.

What to do

1. Limit your child's television viewing time and make your rules and reasons clear. Involve your child in choosing which programs to watch. Read the TV schedule together to choose.

2. Monitor what your child is watching, and whenever possible, watch the programs with your child.

3. When you watch shows with your child, discuss what you have seen so your child can better understand the programs.

4. Look for programs that will stimulate your child's interests and encourage reading (such as dramatizations of children's literature and programs on wildlife, natural history, and science).

Many experts recommend that children watch no more than 10 hours of television each week. Limiting television viewing frees up time for reading and writing activities.

It is worth noting that captioned television shows can be especially helpful with children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, studying English as a second language, or having difficulty learning to read.

Make a Book

Turn your child's writing into a homemade book. The effect will be powerful. Suddenly books become a lot more human and understandable.

What you'll need

Construction paper
Yarn or ribbon
Heavy paper or cardboard
Colorful cloth or wrapping paper
Paste
Safety scissors

What to do

1. Paste pages of your child's writings onto pieces of construction paper.

2. Discuss the order the writings should go in. Should all the writings about animals go in one section and the writings about holidays in another? Which writings are the most important and where should they be placed in the book?

3. Number the pages.

4. Make a table of contents.

5. Make covers for the book with heavy paper or cardboard. You might want to paste colorful cloth or wrapping paper onto the covers.

6. Punch holes in the pages and the covers.

7. Bind the book together by lacing the yarn or ribbon through the holes. Make knots in the loose ends or tie them in a bow, so that the yarn or ribbon won't slip out.

8. Add pages to this book as more writings are completed or start a new book.

Making a book is a multi-step process from planning to writing to producing a final product.

Make Your Own Dictionary

A letter dictionary is a long-term project.

What you'll need

Notebook
Pencil, pen, crayons, or markers
Old magazines
Safety scissors
Paste

What to do

1. Help your child head every page or two with a letter of the alphabet.

2. Cut out pictures of things from old magazines that start with the letters and paste them on the appropriate pages.

3. Help your child label the pictures.

If it stops being fun, you can come back to the project at a later time. When you come back to it, don't worry if your child forgets something. That's the nature of young children.

Parents and the Schools

Success in school depends, in large part, on your child's ability to read, and your role in helping your child become a reader extends into the classroom. The kind of support you provide will, of course, change as your child grows older. Your involvement and monitoring your child's progress in school can help your child become a better reader.

Involvement in school programs can take many forms, from attending PTA meetings to volunteering in school activities. Through action, not just words, you demonstrate to your child that school is important.

In monitoring your child's progress in learning to read, you need to look at both the programs offered at school and your child's performance. Below is a checklist for different levels of schooling. There is much more information available to help you evaluate school reading programs. (See the Resources section, "For Parents.")

Kindergarten

Do teachers frequently read aloud?

Are favorite stories read over and over again and is "pretend" reading encouraged?

Are there story discussions with opportunities for children to talk and listen?

Are there good materials available for children to read and have read to them?

Do teachers discuss with children the different purposes of reading?

Do children have opportunities to write? Do they compose messages to other people?

Beginning Reading Programs

When children start school, they receive their first formal instruction in reading. At this stage, they learn to identify words--by translating groups of letters into spoken words.

Does the program include teaching the relationship between letters and sounds (phonics)?

Are children reading stories that encourage them to practice what they are learning?

Are children's reading materials interesting? Do they accommodate a child's limited reading vocabulary and the need to practice word identification with exciting stories?

Are teachers still reading stories aloud to children and including good children's literature?

Developmental Reading Programs

Do reading and writing activities occur in every classroom and in every subject studied? As you walk through the school, do you see displays of children's writing on bulletin boards?

Are teachers providing direct instruction--teaching strategies that help students become better readers?

Are there plenty of opportunities for children to practice reading? (For third and fourth graders, this should include at least two hours a week of independent reading in school.)

Are there well-stocked school or classroom libraries? (Schools may enrich their collections by borrowing from a local public library.)

Are children encouraged to write meaningfully about what they read? It is not enough to fill in the blanks on worksheets; the point is to have children think about what they read, relate it to what they already know, and communicate these thoughts to others.

Evaluating Your Child's Progress

It is important to monitor your child's progress through reports from the teacher. Also, it is important to attend school open houses or similar events where teachers are available to explain the program and discuss children's progress with their parents.

If you think your child should be doing better, consider meeting privately with the teacher. In most cases, the teacher and principal will be able to shed light on your child's progress and what you might do to help. Your school system may have access to special resources such as a reading specialist and guidance counselor or to materials to address your child's needs.

You may want additional help for your child. A good starting point is the nearest college or university. Most have reading tutorial services that are available on a sliding-fee scale. If not, there may be faculty or graduate students interested in tutoring. Then monitor your child's progress the same way you would his progress in school. If you do not see a difference in performance in 6 to 8 weeks, discuss the program with your child's tutor. Can the tutor explain the goals of the program and document your child's progress? If not, you may wish to consider another course of action.

Some children struggle with reading problems where the cause is readily identifiable. Some of the more widely recognized causes of reading problems are vision and hearing impairments and poor speech and language development. But there are other

schoolchildren who have problems reading because of a learning disability. Whatever the cause or nature of a child's reading problem, the earlier the difficulty is discovered and additional help provided, the better the child's chances are of becoming a successful reader. (See the Resources section, "For Parents.")

The good news is that no matter how long it takes, with few exceptions, children can learn to read. One of the most important roles you can play in relation to your children's schoolwork is that of cheerleader. Applaud their efforts and their successes. Help them have the courage to keep trying.

A Postscript about Older Children

You can't put a teenager on your lap and read stories every night. But you can still help older children become enthusiastic and fluent readers by adapting many of the same principles that work with the little ones. It is especially important to continue the following efforts:

Encourage reading for the fun of it and as a free-time activity.

Create an environment rich with books.

Talk and listen to your children. Language is like a four-legged stool: Speaking, listening, reading, and writing are its parts, and each supports the other.

Read with your children every chance you get--even if it's just part of a newspaper article at the breakfast table.

Encourage children to write by responding to the ideas they try to communicate in writing.

Set the example--put a book in your hands and be sure your children know you read for enjoyment and to get needed information.

Monitor your children's schoolwork and applaud their efforts.

Resources

For Children

What follows is a sampling from the wealth of children's literature available.

Listed by age groups are three kinds of children's materials.

Books that relate to real-life events

Poems

Magazines

There are many other excellent lists of children's books. For more information, see the next section, "Resources for Parents."

Children's Books and Real-Life Events

One sure way to get children to love to read is to make connections between books and what happens in their lives. If the book relates to what happened in real life and children see themselves in it, both the story and the event take on greater meaning. There are numerous books that deal with almost any event in a child's life. We present here a few illustrative topics to show the relation between books and life. Topics chosen include celebrating family occasions; the very personal experience of a loose tooth; a new baby; and knowing more about explorations in outer space.

Family Celebrations: Ages 4 to 8

Clifton, Lucille. Some of the Days of Everette Anderson; Ness, Evaline, illustrator. Henry Holt & Company.

Greenfield, Eloise. Honey, I Love and Other Love Poems; Dillon, Diane and Leo, illustrators. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Ringgold, Faith. Tar Beach. Crown.

Say, Allen. Tree of Cranes. Houghton Mifflin.

Zolotow, Charlotte. Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present; Sendak, Maurice, illustrator. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Over and Over; Williams, Garth, illustrator. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Family Celebrations: Ages 7 to 12

Adoff, Arnold. In for Winter, Out for Spring; Pinkney, Jerry, illustrator. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Baylor, Byrd. I'm in Charge of Celebrations; Parnall, Peter, illustrator. Macmillan Children's Book Group/Scribners.

Goble, Paul. Her Seven Brothers. Bradbury Press.

Esbensen, Barbara J. The Star Maiden: An Ojibway Tale; Davie, Helen K., illustrator. Little, Brown and Company.

Lose Tooth: Ages 5 to 8

Bate, Lucy. Little Rabbit's Loose Tooth; De Groat, Diane, illustrator. Crown.

Birdseye, Tom. Air Mail to the Moon. Gammell, Stephen, illustrator. Holiday.

Brown, Marc. Arthur's Tooth. Little, Brown and Company/Joy Street.

Carson, Jo. Pulling My Leg; Downing, Julie, illustrator. Orchard.

Cole, Joanna. Missing Tooth; Hafner, Marilyn, illustrator. Random House.

McCloskey, Robert. One Morning in Maine. Viking Press.

McPhail, David. The Bear's Toothache. Little, Brown and Company/Joy Street.

New Baby: Ages 5 to 8

Alexander, Martha. Nobody Asked Me If I Wanted a Baby Sister. Dial Press.

Byars, Betsy. Go and Hush the Baby; McCully, Emily, illustrator. Puffin/Penguin.

Clifton, Lucille. Everette Anderson's Nine Month Long; Grifalconi, Ann, illustrator. Henry Holt & Company.

Henkes, Kevin. Julius, the Baby of the World. Greenwillow Books.

Williams, Vera B. More, More, More, Said the Baby. Greenwidow Books.

New Baby: Ages 7 to 12

Ellis, Sarah. A Family Project. Macmillan Children's Books/McElderry.

Galbraith, Kathryn O. Roommates and Rachel; Graham, Mark, illustrator. Macmillan Children's Books/McElderry.

Greenwald, Sheila. Alvin Webster's Surefire Plan for Success (and How It Failed). Little, Brown and Company/Joy Street.

Space Exploration: Ages 4 to 8

Barton, Byron. I Want to Be an Astronaut. Crowell.

Branley, Franklyn M. The Sky Is Full of Stars; Bond, Felicia, illustrator. Crowell.

Marshall, Edward. Space Case; Marshall, James, illustrator. Dial Press.

Minarik, Else H. Little Bear; Sendak, Maurice, illustrator. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Murphy, Jill. What Next, Baby Bear! Dial Press.

Wildsmith, Brian. Professor Noah's Spaceship. Oxford.

Space Exploration: Ages 8 to 12

Apfel, Necia H. Nebulae: The Birth and Death of Stars. Lothrop.

Blumberg, Rhoda. The First Travel Guide to the Moon: What to Pack, How to Go, and What to See When You Get There. Four Winds.

Branley, Franklyn M. The Planets in Our Solar System; Madden, Don, illustrator and photographer. Crowell.

Rockets and Satellites, 2nd revised edition; Maestro, Giulio, illustrator. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Cole, Joanna. The Magic School Bus Lost in the Solar System; Degen, Bruce, illustrator. Scholastic, Inc.

Embury, Barbara, and Crouch, Tom D. The Dream Is Alive: A Flight of Discovery Aboard the Space Shuttle; with photographs from Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Fox, Mary Virginia. Women Astronauts: Aboard the Space Shuttle; revised edition. Messner.

Lauber, Patricia. Seeing Earth from Space. Orchard.

Livingston, Myra Cohn. Space Songs; Fisher, Leonard Everett, illustrator. Holiday House.

Ride, Sally, and Okie, Susan. To Space and Back. Lothrop.

Simon, Seymour. Look to the Night Sky: An Introduction to Star Watching; illustrations and star charts. Puffin/Penguin.

Celebrate the Joy of Poetry: Ages 5 to 12

Bagert, Brod. Let Me Be... the Boss, Poems for Kids to Perform; Smith, G.L., illustrator. Wordsong/Boyds Mills Press.

Bryan, Ashley, ed. All Night, All Day: A Child's First Book of African-American Spirituals; Thomas, David Manning, musical arranger. Atheneum.

Ciardi, John. The Monster Den: or Look What Happened at My House--and To It; Gorey, Edward, illustrator. Wordsong/Boyds Mills Press.

You Know Who; Gorey, Edward, illustrator. Wordsong/Boyds Mills Press.

de Regniers, Beatrice S., ed. Sing a Song of Popcorn: Every Child's Book of Poems; illustrated by nine Caldecott Medal artists. Scholastic, Inc.

Esbensen, Barbara J. Cold Stars and Fireflies: Poems of the Four Seasons; Bonners, Susan, illustrator. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Giovanni, Nikki. Spin a Soft Black Song, Martins, George, illustrator. Hill & Wang/Farrat, Straus and Giroux.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. Happy Birthday; Knight, Hilary, illustrator. Simon & Schuster.

On the Farm; Molk, Laurel, illustrator. Little, Brown and Company.

Lewis, Claudia. Up in the Mountains: And Other Poems of Long Ago; Fontaine, Joel, illustrator. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Lewis, J. Patrick. Earth Verses and Water Rhymes; Sabuda, Robert, illustrator. Atheneum.

Prelutsky, Jack. For Laughing Out Loud: Poems to Tickle Your Funnybone; Priceman, Marjorie, illustrator. Alfred A. Knopf.

The Random House Book of Poetry for Children; Lobel, Arnold, illustrator. Random House.

Sky-Peck, Kathryn, ed. Who Has Seen the Wind? An Illustrated Collection of Poetry for Young People; with photographs of paintings from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Rizzoli International Publications.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. A Child's Garden of Verses; Le Mair, Henriette Willebeek, illustrator. Philomel.

Children's Magazines

General Interest for Ages 2 to 12

Cricket, the Magazine for Children, P.O. Box 52961, Boulder, CO 80322-2961.

Highlights for Children, 2300 West Fifth Avenue, Columbus, OH 43272-0002.

Story Magazines for Ages 4 to 9

Chickadee, Young Naturalist Foundation, P.O. Box 11314, Des Moines, IA 50340.

Ladybug, Cricket Country Lane, Box 50284, Boulder, CO 80321-0284.

Sesame Street Magazine, Children's Television Workshop, One Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023.

Science, Nature, Sports, Math & History for Ages 7 to 12

Cobblestone: The History Magazine for Young People, Cobblestone Publishing, Inc., 30 Grove Street, Peterborough, NH 03458.

DynaMath, Scholastic, Inc., 730 Broadway, New York, NY 10003.

National Geographic World, National Geographic Society, 17th and M Streets NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Odyssey, Kalmbach Publishing Co., P.O. Box 1612, Waukesha WI 53187.

Ranger Rick, National Wildlife Federation, 1400 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036-2266.

Sports Illustrated for Kids, Time Inc., Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020-1393.

3-2-1 Contact, Children's Television Workshop, One Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023.

U*S*Kids, Field Publications, 245 Long Hill Road, Middletown, CT 06457.

Zillions, Consumers Union, 101 Truman Avenue, Yonkers, NY 10703-1057.

Resources For Parents

The resources below are primarily for parents, but you can use them to guide you to resources for your children as well. Many of the books include excellent children's book lists; two are outstanding anthologies(*). In addition, don't overlook your public library as a source of book lists for children. Many publish their own lists of books that may relate to special programs for children or community needs and events.

Butler, Dorothy. Babies Need Books, 2nd edition. Atheneum.

Cullinan, Bernice. Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read. Scholastic, Inc.

*Fadiman, Clifton, ed. The World Treasury of Children's Literature. Little, Brown and Company.

Graves, Ruth, ed. The RIF** Guide to Encouraging Young Readers. Doubleday. (** Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.)

Hearne, Betsy. Choosing Books for Children. Delacorte Press.

Kimmel, Margaret Mary. For Reading Out Loud: A Guide to Sharing Books with Children. Delacorte Press.

Larrick, Nancy. A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading, 5th edition. Bantam Books.

*Russell, William F., ed. Classics to Read Aloud to Your Children, 1984 edition. Crown.

Sader, Marion. Reference Books for Young Readers: Authoritative Evaluations of Encyclopedias, Atlases, and Dictionaries. Bowker.

Trelease, Jim. The New Read-Aloud Handbook. Penguin Handbooks.

In Addition

The Library of Congress, Children's Literature Center prepares an annual list of more than 100 of the best children's books recently published for preschool through junior high school age. To order Books for Children, #8 (1992), send $1 to the Consumer Information Center, Department 101Z, Pueblo, CO 81009.

The organizations below also publish lists of children's books and other helpful brochures that are available free or at a nominal cost, as well as books for parents on helping children learn to read. Request titles and ordering information directly from:

American Library Association
Publications Order Department
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.
Publications Department
Smithsonian Institution
600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20024-2520

Federal Sources of Assistance If Your Child Has a Reading Problem or Leaning Disability

ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013-1492

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services 9000 Rockville Pike, Bldg. 31
Bethesda, MD 20892

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
Library of Congress
Washington, DC 20542
(202) 702-5100

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC 20202

Federal Publications for Parents on Helping Your Child

In addition to Helping Your Child Learn To Read, the U.S. Department of Education publishes a number of books on related subjects. To find out what's available and how to order, request the Consumer Information Catalog listing nearly 200 useful federal publications. The Catalog is free from the:

Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009.

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Bernice Cullinan is a professor of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at New York University and a highly acclaimed reading specialist. She has authored numerous books about children and reading, most recently Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read.

Brod Bagert is the author of several books of poetry for children to read out loud. Mr. Bagert visits dozens of American cities as a keynote speaker for Bill Martin, Jr.'s Pathways to Literacy. During the school year he is invited to schools across the nation to read his poetry aloud as a way of motivating children to read.

Darlene Marie Francis is a Guild Member of YA/YA Gallery and an art student at Delgado Community College in New Orleans, Louisiana. She has also studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti, Perugia, Italy. Her work has been displayed in galleries in New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Memphis in the United States, as well as in Paris, London, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Tuscany. Her whimsically painted chairs have appeared on Sesame Street, MTV, Today, and Japanese TV.

What We Can Do To Help Our Children Learn

Listen to them and pay attention to their problems.

Read with them.

Tell family stories.

Limit their television watching.

Have books and other reading materials in the house.

Look up words in the dictionary with them.

Encourage them to use an encyclopedia.

Share favorite poems and songs with them.

Take them to the library--get them their own library cards.

Take them to museums and historical sites, when possible.

Discuss the daily news with them.

Go exploring with them and learn about plants, animals, and local geography.

Find a quiet place for them to study.

Review their homework.

Meet with their teachers.

Do you have other ideas?