Elementary School • November 2021

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Conversations about books boost thinking skills, memory and comprehension

When your child discusses what she's reading in detail, it can bolster her memory, critical thinking skills and comprehension. Here are some ways to foster conversations about books:



- **Discuss books** with your child after she finishes reading them. Ask her what she thought of the characters, plot and ending. Consider reading the book yourself for a more in-depth talk.
- **Encourage family discussions.** Everyone in your family can read the same book and then gather one evening to share their views. Did anyone have the same favorite part?
- **Help your child** start a book club with her friends. After they finish reading the same book, your child can host a book club meeting—in person or online—to discuss what they have read.

Source: A. Ketch, "Conversation: The Comprehension Connection," *The Reading Teacher*, (Wiley-Blackwell).

Play this synonyms and antonyms game

Using *synonyms* (words with similar meanings) and *antonyms* (words with opposite meanings) enriches your child's vocabulary. Try this easy game to help your child learn to use them. To play:

1. **The first player names an adjective** (a descriptive word), such as *excellent*. Then, she calls out a synonym of that word, like *wonderful*.
2. **The second player gives an antonym** (opposite)—in this case, *terrible*. That player then names another word and a synonym (for example, *bright* and *dazzling*) for which the first player can name an antonym (*dim*).

In a variation of this game, the first player names a word and its antonym, such as *mean* and *nice*. The second player names another synonym for each of those words (*rotten* and *kind*).

Teach sight words through touch

Sight words are words that students will see over and over—so often that they need to recognize them at first sight. They include words such as *the*, *about* and *because*. Knowing them makes reading much easier.



To practice sight words, have your child write a few in glue and then cover them with glitter, sand or yarn. When the words dry, your child can trace them with his finger as he reads.

Use a dictionary and your child's name to expand vocabulary

Have your child look through a dictionary and write down 10 unfamiliar words that begin with the first letter of her name. Have her define the words and put them in alphabetical order. Then, ask your child to write a sentence for each word and read it aloud to you.



Keep track of reading progress

The older your child gets, the more he'll read to himself. That can make monitoring his reading skills tough. To be sure your child is making reading progress, check that he:



- **Reads books at his own** reading level independently.
- **Enjoys reading** by himself.
- **Can understand and analyze** the information that he reads on his own.
- **Uses reading as a way** to learn new information.

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Take advantage of your local library



The library isn't just a place to find new books to read with your child. Libraries offer a wealth of information, programs and other helpful services. Here are just a few things you can find at the library:

- **Read-aloud and book club programs.** Some of these may be led by children. There may also be presentations by authors that your child enjoys.
- **Reference materials.** Help familiarize your child with dictionaries, almanacs, atlases and encyclopedias, in print and online. Knowing how to use these resources will help her find reliable information for assignments.
- **More than just books.** From magazines to audiobooks to movies, there is a lot more than just books at the library. See what you and your child can find on your next visit!

Word webs help students see the connections between words and ideas

Creating word webs is a visual way for your child to connect concepts, questions and words. Word webs can also help your child organize thoughts and create a framework for writing.

To create a word web, have your child:

1. **Write a word** in the middle of a blank sheet of paper (*gardens*, for example).
2. **Write other words** around the page that relate to the main concept (*vegetables*, *grow*, *plants*). Draw lines that connect these new words to the center word.
3. **Think of words** that relate to some of his other words. For example, he might write *tomatoes* as a branch off the word *vegetables* and *water* as a branch off the word *grow*.





Q: My daughter's teacher says she is reading at grade level. How can I make sure she continues to improve?

A: The absolute best way to keep building reading skills is to read, read, read. Make reading an important part of family life. Ask your child to read out loud to you often. If she stumbles on a word, give her clues to help her figure it out, but don't dwell on it. It's more important for her to enjoy reading than to get every word right.

Reading boosts language skills

The more your child reads, the more he will be exposed proper grammar that published authors use. In addition, your child will gain familiarity with language specific to different types of writing. For example, reading poetry may introduce him to a variety of new adjectives.



For lower elementary readers:

- ***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 fascinating facts about honey bees.



- ***Prince and Pirate*** by Charlotte Gunnufson. Two fish that are used to being on their own are put into the same fish tank, so they must find a way to get along.

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.
- ***The Key to Extraordinary*** by Natalie Lloyd (Scholastic Press). Every woman in Emma's family lives an extraordinary life, revealed to each of them in a dream. So, Emma eagerly waits for her own dream.

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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

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(a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.)
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
1-800-756-5525, ISSN: 1533-3302
www.parent-institute.com

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