

BUILDING READERS

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Butner Elementary School
Home of the Bears

Fill the shortest day of the year with winter fun & learning

December 21 is the winter solstice. It's the shortest day of the year. After this, days start to grow longer (until next June). Learning about this as a family can strengthen your child's:

- **Reading skills.** Head to the library (or boot up the computer) and research why this day is so short.
- **Vocabulary.** List words like *orbit*, *equator*, *hemisphere*, *celestial*, etc. Have your child put these in alphabetical order, then find and write their definitions.
- **Oral language skills.** Since it gets dark so early, share stories around a fire or flashlight after dinner.
- **Observation skills.** Look on the national weather map for sunrise and sunset times. Can you find if the times vary in another part of the country?



Jack Hollingsworth

"A library should be like a pair of open arms."
—Roger Rosenblatt

Reluctant readers need a little support

Do you have a child who can read, but avoids books? If so, there are many ways you can help him learn to love it. Start with a positive attitude. Remember that interest in reading blossoms when adults are supportive. For example:

- **Accept your child's reading choices.** It's great to suggest books that match his skills and interests. But let your child pick what to read, even if it seems "too easy." And if he's bored with a book after reading two chapters, don't make him finish it.
- **Help your child get hooked.** If you read the first chapter of a book aloud, he may keep reading it himself. Also link books to other interesting materials, including magazines and newspapers. ("Here's an article about poodles, just like the dog in your book!")

Source: P. Scales, "Winning Back Your Reluctant Readers," *RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers*, www.randomhouse.com/highschool/RHI_magazine/reluctant_readers/scales.html.

Analogy problems are to tests as reading skills are to school success

Students have to read analogy problems on some standardized tests. In an **analogy**, the first two words are related to each other in the same way as the second two are related. For example, "*Football is to field as tennis is to court.*" (Both sports are played on those surfaces.) In analogy problems, one of the words is left out and your child must provide it. Try these:



- **Hot is to cold** as *top* is to _____.
(*Bottom*—because the words are opposites.)
- **Apple is to fruit** as *carrot* is to _____.
(*Vegetable*—because the words are in categories.)

Let 'Bookfinder' suggest books

Before you visit the library with a young reader, check out the "Bookfinder" at PBS Parents (www.pbs.org/parents/bookfinder).

Select your child's grade (up to third grade) and favorite themes. Voila! A list of suggested titles appears.



Make family reading a daily priority

Learning to read is one goal. *Continuing to read* is another! Kids need strong reading skills throughout school and life. So once your child can read, make sure she keeps reading. Everything counts, from recipes to videogame instructions to cereal boxes. Make reading—and talking about what you read—part of every day.



Address reading challenges right away

Statistics show that if your child struggles with reading, she's not alone. Nearly 40% of kids have trouble learning to read! The key is to get help early.

First, try to identify the problem. Has your child's difficulties with reading cropped up suddenly? They may be a result of stress your child is under. Talk with your child, her teacher or any other adult who sees your child frequently to see if that could be the case.

If your child's difficulties with reading have shown up more gradually, as her schoolwork becomes more demanding, she could have a learning disability. Talk to your child's teacher. He may be able to provide extra help for your child—and suggest things you can do at home, too. Or he may encourage formal evaluation.

Remember, when parents and schools work together, children always benefit.



Cultivate thinking skills

Good readers are curious. They often stop to ask questions about what they're reading.



Talk with your child about why characters do what they do. If you're reading *Charlotte's Web*, you might ask, "Why do you suppose Charlotte decided to help Wilbur by writing words in her web?" Have your child think about how he might have written the book differently.

For lower elementary readers:

- **Magnus Maximus, A Marvelous Measurer**, by Kathleen T. Pelley (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). Old Magnus loves to measure. But when his glasses break, life changes. A child teaches him to find joy.



- **Something BIG Has Been Here** by Jack Prelutsky (HarperCollins). Rib-tickling rhymes will keep you and your child coming back to this book of poems again and again.

For upper elementary readers:

- **Abby Carnelia's One and Only Magical Power** by David Pogue (Roaring Brook Press). This charming tale introduces a regular girl with a seemingly pointless magical power.
- **Missile Mouse: the Star Crusher**, by Jake Parker (Scholastic). This first-in-a-series adventure features a secret agent rodent. Missile Mouse's first assignment: Rescue a kidnapped scientist!

A strong vocabulary helps in every subject

Vocabulary words help kids read better, learn more and succeed on tests. That's why they're assigned in almost every subject. To study vocabulary words in any class, suggest that your child:

- **Write** each word's definition and use each word in a sentence.
- **Make** crossword puzzles to practice spelling and defining words.
- **Use** flash cards.
- **Play** charades with words. (One player acts out the definition while others guess the word.)
- **Challenge** himself to use one vocabulary word in conversation throughout the day.



Photodisc/Andrew Olney

Source: "A Test-Taker's Vocabulary for Social Studies," Teaching Today, <http://teachingtoday.glencoe.com/howtoarticles/a-test-takers-vocabulary-for-social-studies>.



Q: Is comprehension something that happens during, or after, reading a story?

A: Both. The more easily kids can read, the better they understand the story—not just its individual words. To help your child build comprehension after reading, ask questions. Where did the story take place? How did it end? Does it remind you of anything in your life? Show interest in your child's answers and opinions.

Do you have a question about reading? Email readingadvisor@parent-institute.com.

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