

BUILDING READERS

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Butner Elementary School
Home of the Bears

Poetry adds to your family reading routine

Through poetry, children can learn to love language. They learn to have fun with words. And, if you memorize favorite poems as a family, children can learn to improve their memory. Plus, poems are great to share when your family's read-aloud time is limited. To develop your family's passion for poetry, keep these tips in mind:

- **Start with the classics**, like *Where the Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein, *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children* or anything written by Jack Prelutsky.
- **Act poems out.** Use a booming voice, a whisper or a squeaky voice—whatever you think is appropriate. Or change the words and see who can make the silliest new poem.
- **Encourage your child to pen his own poem.** Help him include some of the hallmarks of poetry, such as *imagery*—using language to show how something looks, sounds, tastes, smells or feels—or *personification*—giving objects human qualities, such as “the tree's branches *hugged* the boy.”



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“The greatest gift is the passion for reading.

It is cheap, it consoles, it distracts, it excites, it gives you knowledge of the world and experience of a wide kind.”

—Elizabeth Hardwick

‘Teaching’ teaches important lessons

It's fun for kids to correct their parents. Turn this into a grammar lesson by asking your child to fix your mistakes and explain the corrections she decided to make. Here's what to do:

1. **Say or write sentences with one or more errors.** For example, “Jennifer and me went to the store” or “I went to philadelphia with Dad on monday.”
2. **Review the problems together.** In the first sentence *me* should be *I*. In the second sentence, *Philadelphia* and *Monday* need to be capitalized.

Kids need your influence on reading

Reading is critical to students' success. It needs to be a priority. Experts worry that kids spend so much time watching TV and using electronics that reading falls by the wayside. Make time for reading *every* day. Keep in mind that “screen time” isn't a good reward for reading. It shouldn't be taken away as a punishment for not reading, either.



Source: “Creating a Reading Environment at Home,” Reading Is Fundamental, www.rif.org/parents/articles/Creating.msp.

Show your interest with questions

To show support and interest in reading, ask your child questions such as, “What page are you on?” “Who's the main character?” “How did you pick that book?” Pay attention to her answers. Is she understanding the book? Enjoying it? Confused about anything? Find ways to help if needed.



Source: Nancy Atwell, *The Reading Zone*, ISBN: 0-439-92644-7, Scholastic.

Sound effects increase attention

Here's an engaging way to help your child think about stories you read aloud. Make an audio book, and have him add sound effects. While you record the story, your child can create thunder or wail like a siren. Listening carefully will help him add the right noises. Later, he'll have fun hearing the results!



Source: Jackie Silberg, *The Learning Power of Laughter*, ISBN: 0-87659-268-X, Gryphon House.

Research shows that reading aloud works

Reading aloud to your child is a research-proven way to improve reading skills—and it's also relaxing and fun. Among other things, read-aloud time:

- **Builds** interest in reading.
- **Motivates** children to become better readers.
- **Helps** kids understand the structure of stories.
- **Teaches** common phrases, such as, "Once upon a time."
- **Shows** how printed words relate to their meanings.
- **Clarifies** words and information kids might not understand.
- **Is** the most essential activity for reading success!



Source: J. Gold and A. Gibson, "Reading Aloud to Build Comprehension," Reading Rockets, www.readingrockets.org/article/343.

Saving words in a 'bank' can improve writing

Young writers often have trouble thinking of the words they know. So when they're writing, they fall back on the same few words.

Create lists of words—or **word banks**—in advance to help your child think of words. Then when she's writing, she'll find just the right word to use.

For example, ask your child to list words that mean "said." She might include *whispered*, *whined*, *shouted* and *yelled*. Write these on a piece of paper under the heading "said."

Another word bank might include words about a favorite thing. If your child likes cars, the list could include *engine*, *wheels*, *drive*, *sedan* and *SUV*.



Kraig Scarbinsky

Keep these word banks in a three-ring notebook. When your child has writing to do for school, get out the word bank and she'll have many more words from which to choose.



Q: My child says he doesn't like reading—but it's my favorite activity. How can I help him learn to love it?

A: In the early grades children are still learning how to read. This is harder for some kids than it is for others—and they can become frustrated. Rather than pushing your child to practice reading, make

it easy to read for pleasure. Give your child easy-to-read books and magazines. When older kids say they "don't like reading," there are often underlying causes. Talk with your child's teacher about the possibilities.

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

Favorites lead the way to reading

Children may not always have an answer for the question, "What do you want to read?" Instead try, "What movies do you like?" Or "What's your favorite animal?" Questions like these reveal topics your child might like to read about. Use them to find good reading materials, and ask a librarian to help.



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

For lower elementary readers:

- ***A Book*** by Mordcai Gerstein (Roaring Brook Press). What if a family lived inside a book? This clever story tells all.
- ***Little Mouse Gets Ready*** by Jeff Smith (Raw Junior). When Little Mouse gets dressed, it's an adventure. But his mother has a surprising reaction to his success!



For upper elementary readers:

- ***When You Reach Me*** by Rebecca Stead (Wendy Lamb Books). This award-winning tale is set in 1970s New York, where Miranda ponders a classic novel and mysterious notes that seem to predict the future.
- ***A Faraway Island*** by Annika Thor (Delacorte Press). In this popular story originally published in Swedish, two sisters escape the Nazis and live in Sweden. The transition is easier for one girl than the other.

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